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# **Turkey's 'New' Foreign Policy in the Middle East**

## **The Civil Society Factor**

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A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of a Ph.D in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies

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## **Abstract**

This thesis aims to address a key and understudied element of Turkish foreign-policy under the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP): the civil-society factor. It answers the question: How has foreign-policy and diplomacy changed in this era due to the domestic dynamics, exploring how Turkey's image and global standing is dependent on the legitimacy and activism of non-state actors. The central aim being to understand how the interests, identity and practices of civil-society organizations (CSOs) have changed modes and channels of engagement with the Middle East: with Turkey increasingly deploying economic, humanitarian and cultural diplomacy in their relations with the region. The theoretical focus provides an alternative perspective on foreign-policy from a societal and ideational perspective. The empirical focus examines the development of civil-society in Turkey alongside the trajectory of changing foreign relations with the Middle East. This thesis highlights the variation in CSOs in terms of their relationship with the government: the type of interaction based on a number of variables such as autonomy from the government, the democratization process, the security environment and openings in the political space. By analysing the patterns of interaction and influence of CSOs, this dissertation contributes to the literature on civil-society influence and literature on Turkish foreign-policy (TFP).

This thesis aims to contribute to growing research on civil-society's role in Turkey, however within the specific and understudied context of Middle East relations. It chooses civil-society as the main unit of analysis in what is acknowledged to be a complex and multifaceted policy environment. However, as will be discussed throughout this thesis in relation to strong elements of continuity in TFP, the emergence of normative discourses, social, economic and political ties at the level of civil-society is one of the most distinct changes of the AKP era. Turkey's engagement with the Middle East has been shaped, and channelled through these actors, legitimized to the public and the international community. This renders the behaviour of Turkish CSOs even more significant to international relations, with Turkey's pre-2013 image as a regional mediator, humanitarian diplomat and soft-power contingent on these actors.

## **Declaration**

### **This is to certify that:**

- (a) This thesis has been composed by the candidate, Harriet Ann Fildes
- (b) The work is the candidate's own
- (c) The work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

**Harriet Fildes**

**October 2017**

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## **Acronyms**

AKP AK Party - Adalet Ve Kalkinma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)

AoC - Alliance of Civilizations

ANAP - Anavatan Partisi (Motherland Party)

BNGO - Business-affiliated NGO

CHP - Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party)

DIB - Diyanet Isleri Bakanligi (Presidency of Religious Affairs)

DEP - Demokrasi Partisi (Democracy Party)

DP - Demokrat Parti (Democratic Party)

DSP - Demokratik Sol Parti (Democratic Left Party)

ECHR - European Convention on Human Rights

EMP - Euro-Mediterranean Partnership

EC - European Community

EU - European Union

FDI - Foreign Direct Investment

GAP - Guney Dogu Anadolu Projesi (Southeast Anatolia Project)

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

GPoT - Global Political Trends Centre

GNGO - Governmental NGO

GNP – Gross National Product

GO - Governmental Organization

HLCC - High Level Cooperation Council

IHA - International humanitarian assistance

IHH - İnsani Yardım Vakfi (Humanitarian Relief Foundation)

IKV - İktisadi Kalkın Vakfi (Economic Development Foundation)

IMF - International Monetary Fund

InNGO – Independent NGO

IPC - Istanbul Policy Centre

IR - International Relations

MENA – Middle East and North Africa

MHP - Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (National Movement Party)

MÜSIAD - Mustakil Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği (Association of Independent Industrialists and Businessmen)

NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NGO - Non-Governmental Organisations

NSC - National Security Council

OECD - Organisation For Economic Co-Operation and Development

OIC - Organisation of Islamic Cooperation

ORSAM - Ortadoğu Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi (Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies)

OSCE - Organisation For Security and Cooperation In Europe

PKK - Parti Karkerani Kurdistan (Kurdistan Workers' Party)

SAM - Centre for Strategic Research

SETA - Siyaset, Ekonomi ve Toplum Araştırmaları Vakfı (Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research)

TAF – Turkish Armed Forces

TESEV - Türkiye Ekonomik ve Sosyal Etüdler Vakfı (Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation)

TEPAV Türkiye Ekonomi Politikaları Araştırma Vakfı (Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey)

TFP - Turkish Foreign-policy

TGF Turkish General Staff

TIKA - Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency

TOBB - Türkiye Odalar ve Borsalar Birliği (Union of Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Commodity Exchange of Turkey)

TUSEV- Türkiye Üçüncü Sektör Vakfı (Third Sector Foundation of Turkey)

TÜSİAD - Türk Sanayicileri ve İşadamları Derneği (Turkish Industrialists and Business Association)

TUSKON - Türkiye İş Adamları ve Sanayiciler Konfederasyonu (Turkish Confederation of

Businessmen and Industrialists)

UN - United Nations

UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

UNSC - United Nation Security Council

USAK - The International Strategic Research Organization

WP - Welfare Party (Refah Partisi)

YOK - Council of Higher Education

## Chapter One

### Introduction

*Shining silver and clean bold lettering, one of Turkey's foremost think tanks USAK stands tall in the leafy Bahçelievler suburb of Ankara. Once government favourites, the International Strategic Research Foundations' rise to prestige and unusual influence was noted jealously by more than a few interviewees during the course of this research. Their regal offices are close to the capital's heart, to positions of power old and new, secular and Islamic: walking distance from Anıtkabir, Atatürk's final resting place, but also the old town, Ulus, and the rapidly growing neo-Ottoman village surrounding the historic Altındağ. They were once thought to be the pinnacle of Turkish modernity, a think tank with international prestige mirroring the style, values and social status of America's elite institutions. Photographs of Turkish and international leaders lined the gleaming walls, each one having used this site as a stage, signing bilateral agreements, publicizing their foreign-policy successes and pursuing multilateral negotiations. The building, Turkey's first purpose built as a think tank, now stands empty – a victim of the ongoing purges led by President Erdoğan and his AK Party against alleged Gülenist infiltration of the state. USAK's rise and subsequent fall from grace captures the rapidity and the scope of changes to Turkey's domestic and foreign sphere under the AKP: the rise and demise of Turkish civil-society and its questionably 'civil' status to begin with.*

#### 1. Aims and Original Contribution

This research has two main questions: firstly, to ask whether a 'new' foreign-policy orientation has developed under the AKP; and secondly, to understand how civil-society actors have impacted on the stated transformation, explored through an examination of Turkey's foreign relations with the Middle East. The first topic; foreign-policy transformation, is the dependent variable and the second is proposed as an explanatory variable for this change with domestic structures and environmental opportunities/ constraints proposed as the 'mediating variables'. The study is founded on two core arguments. Firstly, that, Turkish foreign-policy towards the Middle East underwent a transformation in orientation, strategies and style during the AKP's first decade in power, from security-orientated to socially, culturally and economically-orientated diplomatic engagement. The second argument is that civil-society organizations (CSOs), born from domestic transformation in the fields of democracy and economics, have influenced the development and implementation of this foreign-policy, tracing the rise of conservative business elites, Islamic NGOs with political power and Middle East facing think tanks in the late 1990s and early 2000s. It is argued that CSOs have gained in influence as the truly new force in TFP, altering the orientation, strategies and style, due to changing conditions

in the foreign-policy-making process following: (i) EU-led democratization and desecuritization; (ii) empowerment of civilian elites and civil-society in decision-making; (iii) increasing role of identity issues and (iv) a changing superstructure of preferences, values, interests and norms in Turkey's foreign-policy sphere. Given the substantial changes Turkey has undergone since 2013 in both its foreign and domestic policies, which correspond to widespread crackdowns on civil-society activities, this research comes at a crucial juncture to direct attention at the potential impact of CSOs, as well as to the impact of the identified core conditions (particularly democratization and changing superstructure preferences since 2013) mediating influence on Turkey's foreign relations: most notably, the end to the soft-power or 'civil' paradigm in TFP.

To address the research question, this thesis will firstly use a comparative framework to examine foreign-policy transformations and developments under the AKP, highlighting continuities from previous eras.<sup>1</sup> Following this comparative analysis, there will be an empirical examination of the selected CSOs for the case-study research, their characteristics, identity and aims. Broadly grouped they reflect those involved in humanitarian/ cultural diplomacy (Islamic NGOs and charities), economy/ technocratic diplomacy (business associations), and public/ intellectual diplomacy (think tanks). This will provide the context for the case-studies in which I will demonstrate my findings regarding the impact of CSOs on foreign relations. The case-study approach is employed to identify change in Turkey's foreign-policy towards the Middle East. The case-study findings will be divided by country and detailed in the latter sections of each chapter, however the vast amount of data is detailed in terms of the internal, external and situational dynamics impacting on different CSOs, limiting or facilitating influence. Internal factors include CSOs' institutional and organizational capacity, their political values, funding and power relations. External factors include the legal, institutional and political environment, socio-cultural factors and economic ones.

As seen above, the individual conditions mediating level and type of influence are vast, however the core conditions mediating whether influence can occur in the first place are both more significant, and less mitigatable, also reflected in the main themes discussed in this thesis. Firstly, a liberalizing socio-political and economic climate (in the Turkish case, democratization, EU accession and desecuritization); secondly, political opening for expert or external input (based on issue salience as well as relations with the government and reliant on the former precondition); thirdly, ideational/ interest alignment with policy elites; and finally, political will (both to utilize CSOs and to normalize or alter foreign relations), which relates to the first three conditions and also to the external political climate, which in general, should be pre- or post-conflict in order for civil-society to play a significant role. The overarching factors were determined to be relations between CSOs and the government, and thus, political will/ opening however, which combined with the aforementioned conditions, either limits or

facilitates CSOs influence. Should any of these conditions deviate significantly, CSO input is severely restricted or else non-existent, as detailed in the post-2013 epilogue, thus exploring these conditions holds analytical value for the study of TFP and Foreign Policy Analysis more broadly.

Theoretically, this thesis will question the relationship between civil-society and foreign-policy. It argues that the normative humanitarian, economic and intellectual discourses and policy behaviour of CSOs have provided alternative channels for TFP under the AKP. CSOs, it will be argued, have also provided a vital source of legitimacy and a communicative channel for the government in its changing engagement, and power play in the Middle East. While civil-society has certainly grown exponentially over the last two decades, and interesting evidence was found relating the activities and strategies of these organizations with changes in Turkey's relations with regional states, the research concluded that efforts on behalf of civil-society to influence foreign relations did not produce systematic results, particularly regarding pluralistic rather than elite driven policy-making. As this research argues throughout, although CSOs can access the AKP's policy-making in some cases conditional on institutional channels of influence derived from the democratization process and increased capacity, enhanced policy influence was found to be largely the result of social and ideational networks between individuals from the same sociocultural background as the AKP. The predominance of Islamic business associations and faith-based NGOs exemplary of this. That said, important empirical evidence of influence from opposition actors was also found prior to 2013, which can be determined as the end-point of the reform period and the soft-power paradigm in TFP. Yet herein lies the original contribution of this thesis. Exploring the rise and demise of civil-society in parallel to changes in Turkey's foreign-policy orientation and style, reveals the normative power of civil-society actors in promoting rights-based, economic or diplomatic solutions to crises, as well as illustrating their role in reproducing and legitimizing foreign-policy decisions on behalf of the state.

## **2. Why Study Civil-society in Turkey?**

In recent decades, CSOs have been brought to the forefront of academic and political discussions regarding democratization and development, as crucial variables influencing such change.<sup>1</sup> The EU process had a considerable impact on integrating public opinion and CSOs

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<sup>1</sup> See R.Belloni. 2001. "Civil-society and Peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina, *Journal of Peace Research*, 38 (2), 163-80; K.F.Abiew., and T.Keating. 2004. "Defining a Role for Civil-society." In: T.Keating, and W.A.Knight, *Building Sustainable Peace*, 93-117. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press; 1992. "Civil-society at Crossroads," *Indicator South Africa* 10 (1), 47-52; and J.Hoffman. 1992. "Third Party Mediation and Conflict Resolution in the Post-Cold War World." In: J.Baylis, and N.Rengger, eds., *Dilemmas of World Politics*. Clarendon Press, Oxford.

into the foreign-policy sphere through changes the legal and judicial system, particularly the punitive Law on Associations, no. 2908. Furthermore, the EU mobilized funds for CSOs in Turkey, incorporated ‘civil-society dialogue’ into the enlargement negotiations and promoted democratization in general. Such legal changes and normative empowerment was pivotal in civil-society’s increasing activism, but also by nature, influenced the ideas and identity of many of these organizations. This arguably ‘Europeanized’ Turkey’s relations with the Middle East through increasing contestation over Turkey’s security conceptions and foreign-policy practices.

While an abundance of literature has emerged detailing the domestic impact of Europeanization on TFP, and more broadly, on the role of civil-society in international development, little had been done to bridge this research, these streams of thinking existing in relative isolation.<sup>2</sup> There has been almost no systematic work on how CSOs attempt to influence the foreign-policy process apart from related to EU accession, which in Turkey includes value-laden regional policies on development, humanitarian aid and diplomacy perfectly suited to civil-society or track II diplomatic efforts. This chapter introduces these actors, and the role of domestic politics in general, in influencing the new trajectory of Turkey’s foreign relations. It locates CSOs at the centre of the three themes flowing through this dissertation: democratization, EU accession, and state-society relations. Furthermore, it discusses the key research parameters, design and makes a case for why inquiry into CSO impact is both timely and significant for a more holistic understanding of ‘new’ foreign-policy under the AKP. This chapter finishes with a detailed research outline for the following chapters.

In the early 2000s, with the election of an ostensibly pro-European Union and pro-democracy party, the AKP, Turkey appeared to be developing the social and political environment needed to build a vibrant civil-society. Decades of repressive domestic policies towards non-governmental organizations (NGOs) however had already forced many to look outwards in their endeavours, adding a specifically international dimension to the work of Turkish CSOs. As the incumbent AKP too sought to explore the region, with Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu at the helm of ‘new’ initiatives in peace-building, humanitarian diplomacy, rapprochement and aid, a new academic strategy to TFP arguably emerged – based upon Davutoğlu’s publications on Turkey’s strategic depth, history and geopolitics, there was a growing demand for expert input, as well as for feet on the ground to expand Turkey’s regional role to one of a central power. With growing activism in soft-power, conflict resolution,

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<sup>2</sup> See Z.Önis, and U.Türem. (2001) ‘Business, Globalization and Democracy: A Comparative Analysis of Turkish Business Associations’, *Turkish Studies*, 2: 2, 94 -120., D.Yavuz (2010) ‘Testing Large Business’s Commitment to Democracy: Business Organizations and the Secular–Muslim Conflict in Turkey’, *Government and Opposition*, 45(1), 73-92.

expanding democratic institutions and a thriving market economy from 2002 until 2013, the Turkish case is a clear example of growing opportunities for CSO activism in the foreign relations sphere, but also of the difficulties in civil-society influence and accompanying democratic consolidation.

Turkish CSOs were already active in the region, but were further incentivised by the small but crucial opening in the foreign-policy establishment spurred by Europeanization and desecuritization, creating a new dynamic in state-society relations which would endure until the mass social uprising of Gezi Park, 2013. This social movement would call an end to Turkey's democratic experiment, however was also a product of the entrenched restrictions and challenges placed upon civil-society by the political establishment: a movement born not from traditional civil-society organisations but society itself, in part due to the increasing inability of institutionalized CSO's to further reform or challenge state power due to their argued incorporation into the state's political project. Combined with the challenges of the Arab Spring and the regional upheaval it catalysed, the rise and demise of Turkish civil-society is illustrative not only of the innate potential and limitations of non-state actors, but also of the limitations of the state in the face of chaotic political upheaval. The Turkish case is also an interesting historical insight into the heady days of the late 1990s and early 2000s, when literature on civil-society building and democracy promotion propounded. This neoliberal democratic experiment appears to have failed, not only in Turkey but globally, as illiberal democracies and autocrats rise where once democratic institutions flourished. The downfall of Turkish civil-society since 2013, and the regression of democratic space illustrates the importance of these actors for stable domestic and international relations. As such, this dissertations' examination of if, how, and in what context civil-society actors operated as a driving force behind Turkey's changing relations with the Middle East is both timely and has analytical value for to scholarly understanding of recent developments in regional relations.

This thesis does not propose a mono-causal explanation and as such, will instead investigate civil-society as the intersection of multiple structural, material and systemic explanations of TFP. Understanding the drivers of governmental decision-making behaviour necessitates an examination of the effects of political culture, organizational structure and the level of influence from external processes such as globalization, Europeanization and economic liberalization in encouraging the development of a democratic consultative framework in which civil-society actors operate and seek to influence policy makers. Why the Middle East has emerged as the main focus of trade, economic relations, humanitarian aid and conflict resolution is an important question. Although there are multiple explanations such as the "zero problems" policy, as well as the reactionary Islamization versus the Kemalist Eurasianist debate, it is argued here that civil-society is an important and under-represented variable



behind this discursive and value-based shift.<sup>3</sup> That new CSOs empowered under the AKP with a Middle East focus have become a crucial aspect, although often a tool, in Turkey's 'new' regional diplomacy. This rise can be attributed broadly to the fertile ground of expanding democratic and economic opportunities combined with growing interest, awareness and ambitions of non-state actors in the foreign-policy sphere: yet also to Turkey's intended image and nation branding activities, making them both an actor and an instrument of TFP. As a small but developing research topic, the role of Turkey's fledgling civil-society needs to be systematically explored in the context of the Middle East, rather than its more traditional European engagements to fully understand the changing nature of Turkey's foreign relations under the ruling AKP.

### **3. Defining Civil-society: Organizations and Scope**

The study of civil-society is marred with contention, and while scholars disagree on what constitutes civil-society or how to understand these groups from theoretical and empirical perspectives, it is not the goal of this thesis to address this debate. Rather, this thesis aims at contributing to the literature on civil-society in Turkey specifically, exploring their interests, identity and aims. That said, some definitions are required to proceed.

Civil-society, from Aristotelian ideas into the realms of political theory that emerged in the late twentieth century due to political upheavals in Central Europe and Latin America has largely been conceptualized as an organized value-laden associational structure which emphasizes pluralism, altruism and consensus in search of common good.<sup>4</sup> It is generally argued within the dominant Hegelian and Tocquevillian literature on civil-society, that civil-society is both independent from the state, and seeks to implement political and social transformation limiting the realms of state power.<sup>5</sup> However, such an approach limits our understanding of the heterogeneous, interactive and porous nature of both state and society, as well as the constitutive nature of civil-society in the state's political project, theorized by Gramsci and discussed in more detail in the literature review.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, it restrains the role of civil-society to the pursuit of particular benefits and the transmission of opinions and information. Since the economic and political transformations of globalization however, the notion of civil-

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<sup>3</sup> E.Akçalı and M.Perinçek (2009) 'Kemalist Eurasianism: an emerging geopolitical discourse Turkey', *Geopolitics*, 14:3, 550–569.

<sup>4</sup> See J.Alexander., 2006, *The civic sphere*. Oxford: Oxford University Press and J.L.Cohen & A.Arato., 1995, *Civil-society and political theory*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

<sup>5</sup> For an extensive review of the genealogy civil-society, see J.Kocka., 2004, "Civil-society from an historical perspective", *European Review*, 12:01, 65- 79

<sup>6</sup> A.Gramsci., 1999. *Hegemony and separation of powers*. Selections from *The Prison Notebooks*.

society has gained huge momentum in international development literature, with growing focus on how civil-society relates both to the state in the global context.<sup>7</sup>

In brief, this thesis considers civil-society to be any form of social association that is voluntary, functionally distinct from the family, economy, religious and political spheres.<sup>8</sup> This includes the three main institutions that will be explored in this thesis: business associations, faith-based NGOs and think tanks/ political research centres. However, the list is far more extensive, including media organizations, professional associations, trade unions, and community groups. The unifying feature of these groups being the value-based nature, the promotion of norms, associative life and communicative action within the public sphere. The core, and distinctive approach taken here is determining the level of autonomy or independence of these organizations, whilst equally exploring how they are inter-related and constitutive of other social and political spheres, primarily the economy, the state and the media. As such, this thesis proposes three preliminary types of CSOs: governmental or quasi-governmental (GNGOs), business-affiliated (BNGOs) and independent or quasi-independent (InNGOs), which will be discussed in detail in chapter three.

A further debate surrounding the theoretical function of civil-society is about violence. Civil-society is often understood to be inherently non-violent within the literature.<sup>9</sup> However, some of the organizations explored within this thesis we found to have alleged links with militarized groups, and even potential funding networks, as will be evidenced in chapter four on Islamic NGOs. Organizations such as these have at best been labelled in the literature as uncivil-society, and at worst, terrorists themselves and therefore no longer belonging of this categorization.<sup>10</sup> However there are strong theoretical debates impelling the inclusion of 'uncivil-society' into the study of civil-society and a broadening of the concept from restrictive presumptions about the nature of civil-society and its relationship with democracy.<sup>11</sup> Whilst agreeing that in its ideal and theoretical form, civil-society, quintessentially, should be non-violent, practices on the ground indicate that certain groups have expanded upon their stated

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<sup>7</sup> See M.Edwards. 2004. *Civil-society*. Cambridge: Polity Press; and R.Cox eds. 2008. *The Paradox of Social Capital: Fuelling Conflict and Building Peace through Trust and Networks*. London: Routledge., and J.Goodhand. 2006. *Aiding Peace. NGOs in Armed Conflict*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

<sup>8</sup> For discussion and conceptual critique of civil-society, see G.White. "Civil-society, democratization and development (I): Clearing the analytical ground." *Democratization* 1, no. 2 (1994): 375-390.

<sup>9</sup> For debate over this, see L.Whitehead, 'Bowling in the Bronx: The Uncivil Interstices between Civil and Political Society', *Democratization*, Vol.4, No.1 (1997), pp.94-114; Larry Diamond, 'Rethinking Civil-society: Toward Democratic Consolidation', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.5, No.3 (1994), pp.4-17.

<sup>10</sup> See P.Kopecký, and C.Mudde. "Rethinking civil-society." *Democratization* 10, no. 3 (2003): 1-14., pp.4-5., and P.Kopecký and E.Barnfield, 'Charting the Decline of Civil-society. Explaining the Changing Roles and Conceptions of Civil-society in East and Central Europe', in J.Grugel (ed.), *Democracy Without Borders. Transnationalization and Conditionality in New Democracies* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp.76-91.

<sup>11</sup> Kopecký, and Mudde, op cit.

purposes and branched into violent forms of political struggle. Gülen affiliated organizations in particular have been accused of this, as have the İnsani Yardım Vakfı (Humanitarian Relief Foundation - IHH). Exploring how these groups operate as civil or uncivil-society holds normative analytical and theoretical value.

Although this thesis will largely draw on liberal theories to understand empirically how CSOs seek influence, as opposed to statist approaches or Marxist theories which view the state as a tool of the bourgeoisie, it will also make reference to Gramscian approaches in the more theoretical critique of the function and utility of civil-society. Specifically, the view of civil-society as an extension of the state's hegemonic project through consent, a complementary and legitimizing force in the continuation of the prevailing ideology of the time, most notably for this thesis, that of neoliberalism as found in Cihan Tuğal's excellent theoretical critiques.<sup>12</sup> These actors, in a neo-Gramscian view, associations have a mutually constitutive relationship with both state and market, in which interests and preferences shape policy, communicated through political society.<sup>13</sup> Essentially, we can see an emerging cohesion or consensus, derived from the dominant paradigm of neoliberalism, between the interests of the dominant societal classes and the foreign practices of the state. In the Turkish case, the soft-power paradigm and economic interdependence as a functionalist tool of conflict resolution and a way to expand markets and opportunities for the Turkish business community.

That said, this research largely builds on a growing liberal literature on the relevance and effectiveness of civil-society in international issues such as democracy building, peacebuilding, conflict resolution and development. This is due to the scope of this thesis, to empirically explore if and how these organizations seek influence, and due to the main hypothesis that through this activism, they have increasingly driven and framed Turkey's relations with the Middle East. From liberal theories on civil-society's role, there are various mechanisms of impact: monitoring, advocacy, socialization, communication, social cohesion and service delivery. This conceptualization of civil-society's interactive role, being both ontological and epistemological, falls into the strand of literature on democratization which does not view civil-society as necessarily antagonistic to the state, or inherently as a democratizing force, but rather as aiming at developing a symbiotic relationship with the state so as to be able to contribute to policy-making.<sup>14</sup> Thus, whilst identifying the autonomy of the civil societal sphere, following the works of Walzer and Alexander, the intersections and

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<sup>12</sup> C.Tuğal. (2009). *Passive revolution: Absorbing the Islamic challenge to capitalism*. Stanford University Press, p.21.

<sup>13</sup> See Tuğal (2009) for an in depth theoretical study on the connection between civil society, political society and hegemony and L.Ramos. "Civil-society in an age of globalization: a neo-Gramscian perspective." *Journal of Civil-society* 2, no. 2 (2006): 143-163.

<sup>14</sup> See Alexander, op cit; L.Boltanski. & L.Thevenot., 2006, *On justification: economies of worth*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; and M.Walzer., 1983, *Spheres of justice*. New York: Basic Books.

interactions between this sphere and the market and the state are acknowledged. Building on the social theory and analytical perspectives of these scholars, who extensively detail the possible economic, social, political and communicative impact of civil-society in the domestic sphere, demarcates a space for this thesis to synthesize these difference disciplinary contributions to identify and explore empirically the possible impact of civil-society outside of the domestic and theoretical spheres in which it is traditionally studied.

There are three main areas of growth regarding the integration of CSOs or NGOs into foreign relations. These CSOs cited below were selected due to their established networks and visibility of activities pertaining to the Middle East specifically, with organizations with an EU/ Atlantic focus precluded due to the research focus of this study. As well as visibility and Middle East focus, these organizations were selected based on their relations with Turkish and international decision-makers (both state and INGOs) and based on their prominent engagement in the main fields studied in this thesis, economic, cultural and public diplomacy through foreign investment, capacity-building, conflict resolution and humanitarian aid. The selection criteria were necessary to directly relate the work of these CSOs to answer the core questions of this thesis, whether there has been a change in the orientation and style of TFP, and how civil-society has impacted upon this change. While there are a number of organizations whose work falls into these fields such as Kurdish human rights groups and environmental movements, none have the kind of international presence or relations with high level decision-makers to be able to identify significant empirical contributions to answer the question of how, and if CSOs are impacting on foreign relations with the Middle East. This is not to argue that they do not have influence, but rather due to lack of available information, organizational capacity, accessible resources or even an online presence at all, it was not within the scope of this thesis to include such organizations. Thus, only the largest, most active and publicly visible organizations with a Middle East focus were selected due to the aforementioned issues of scope and access, with justification for focus on specific organizations detailed in the outline below, and based on Middle East focus and activities, size/ organizational capacity, public visibility and relations with decision-makers.

Firstly; business associations. The main business associations explored here are as follows: The Turkish Industrialists and Business Association, one of Turkey's oldest associations founded in 1971 based on pluralist and pro-democratic, competitive market values. Secular TÜSİAD is heavily engaged in research and policy promotion of social and economic reform, particularly EU accession. MÜSİAD, the Turkish Industrialists and Business Association, is its conservative and considerably smaller counterpart. Founded in 1990 by Anatolian businessmen, it has been heavily engaged in visa liberalization lobbying, defence contracts and encouraging trade ties with the Middle East. TUSKON, The Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists, on the other hand is a Gülen affiliated organization established

in 2005 following EU led changes to Turkey's Law on Associations. While engaged in lobbying at all levels – local to global – it has a strong focus on the African continent with a faith-based development agenda. Finally, the Union of Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Commodity Exchange of Turkey, TOBB, is a semi-public umbrella organization without a definitive political position. However, given its position vis-à-vis the state, its pro-EU stance has been increasingly supplemented by an overtly Islamic-country facing outlook. The Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV), and the Economic Development Foundation (IKV), Turkey's oldest research association, are both affiliated with TOBB and will be discussed in Chapter Three on business associations. It is argued that these actors have increasingly vocalized and implemented their foreign-policy preferences, which has resulted in a change in the type and the level of Turkey's engagement with the Middle East through economic diplomacy (trade, visa liberalization and investment).

Secondly, the role of think tanks will be assessed. This chapter chose a greater number of organizations due to the primary function being socialization and communication, rather than quantifiable activities in service delivery, advocacy, and mobilization. All the think tanks here were established in the early 2000s, under AKP rule and as a direct result of EU reform and funding. This has endowed them with a liberal normative characteristic in terms of the aims and agenda. Firstly, the role of InNGOs will be critiqued in terms of possible influence, citing the Global Political Trends Center (GPoT) and the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV). The next section will explore think tanks activities in foreign relations through case-study research based on their categorization as GNGO, BNGO or InNGO. The GNGOs discussed are the International Strategic Research Organization (USAK) – which was once perceived as the zenith of Turkey's civil-society development. Established in 2004 it is now closed due to alleged Gülen affiliation, however prior to 2016, alongside the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA) – established in 2006, was closely related to the government. The InNGOs are the Marmara Foundation and the Istanbul Policy Centre (IPC). These are two of the strongest think tanks in terms of influence and autonomy, founded prior to the AKP era and significant actors in fields as far reaching as international trade and conflict resolution. The BNGOs under discussion are the Economic Policy Research Foundation (TEPAV) and TÜSIAD Foreign-policy Forum, and will be discussed in terms of their political rather than economic activities. Although instances of direct foreign-policy influence were minimal, these organizations were arguably crucial in constructing a socio-political domestic environment conducive to rapprochement with the Middle East: reproducing the so-called 'Turkish model' of democracy promotion.

Finally, the interests, role and activities of faith-based NGOs will be assessed. The categorization of these organizations will be based on identified religious mission statements, funding sources and/ or board of directors. Starting with the Foundation for Humanitarian

Relief (the IHH) in 1995, Turkish faith-based organizations and charities began to exert pressure over Turkish foreign-policy after their collective empowerment due to their quick and effective disaster response to the 1999 earthquakes in Turkey. Their expansion in the late 1990s meant that most have adopted a preservationist apolitical stance, primarily engaged in service provision, funding and advocacy. That said, ideological divides can still be identified. Unlike the IHH, which has had firm Islamist leanings and close relations with the government since 2002, the ostensibly apolitical International Blue Crescent, founded in 1999 and the Gülen affiliated group Kimse Yok Mu, active since 2002 as one of the largest and best funded aid organizations in Turkey, have had to focus their activities disproportionately on foreign aid and relief due to domestic pressure and have also avoided overtly Islamic narratives of aid, preferring humanitarian framing. Through their longevity and ability to mobilize funds, these organizations have been actively involved in Turkey's economic and foreign-policy. Due to their conservative characteristic, this has a specifically Middle Eastern orientation. Their contribution to Turkey's foreign-policy toolkit in terms of humanitarian aid, development assistance, emergency relief and infrastructure building abroad was substantial, however has declined since the Gülen rift in 2011. These organizations will be discussed in terms of their political affiliations as with think tanks, however divided based on their affiliations with the government, the Hizmet Community or independence.

These CSOs were determined to fulfil certain functions. Four main areas were identified based on the predominant works of civil-society theory, which were: economic,<sup>15</sup> social,<sup>16</sup> political<sup>17</sup> and communicative.<sup>18</sup> Although sometimes difficult to determine specific contributions exclusive to a particular organization, this thesis argues that the mobilization of resources by non-state actors serves as a factor, sometimes enhancing, sometimes influencing, political attitudes and modes of engagement in foreign relations.<sup>19</sup> Not only do they serve an economic function, gathering resources and providing services at home and abroad, it is argued that their social, political and communicative function in democracy promotion and conflict resolution, to some degree, serves to sometimes counter and sometimes constitute state power. There are multiple domains of impact. Although notoriously difficult to quantify, this thesis will provide

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<sup>15</sup> See R.Putnam. (1993). *Making Democracy Work. Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press., and A.Smith. (1759). *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. London: A. Millar.

<sup>16</sup> X.Greffé. (2003). Innovation, value added and evaluation in the third system. *A European Perspective: The Non-profit Sector in a Changing Economy.*, pp. 189-220.

<sup>17</sup> R.Rhodes. (1997). *Understanding Governance: Policy Networks, Governance, Reflexivity, and Accountability*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

<sup>18</sup> J.Habermas. 2006, "Political Communication in Media Society: Does Democracy Still Enjoy an Epistemic Dimension? The Impact of Normative Theory on Empirical Research", *Communication Theory*, 16 (2006) 411–426.

<sup>19</sup> G.Almond. & Verba, S. (1963). *The civic culture. Political attitudes and democracy in five nations*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company., and A.Tocqueville., 1955:2000, *Democracy in America*, New York: Vintage Books.

empirical support for the hypothesis that civil-society has influenced Turkey's relations with the Middle East by examining the economic impact of business associations, the human capital provided by these organizations, as well as by faith-based NGOs and think tanks, and the normative discourses/ communicative role of these organizations insofar as that impacts on civil and political participation, social mobilization and potentially policy-making.<sup>20</sup>

Although I am not exceptionalizing Turkish politics, I do not intend on providing a generalizable model of the pattern of state-society relations. As Metin Heper argues in the context of business associations, these interactions have a 'particular logic behind [them], which closely fits one type of state, or government, and not others.'<sup>21</sup> The context-dependent nature of the influence of civil-society actors, as well as broader regional and global balances, means that while theoretical and conceptual conclusions from the Turkish case may be useful when analysing different states, a more fruitful venture would be the expansion of this research to help explain the evolution of state-society relations throughout Turkish history, looking at how political culture, domestic structures and diffusion of authority impacts upon both the socio-political environment behind domestic and the foreign-policy decision-making. That said, while examining the policy influences of CSOs, this research does not attempt to offer this domestic level as the only source of independent variables determining foreign relations. The role of international variables is often more important. However, this thesis does attempt to show that this domestic factor is a significant and understudied element of foreign relations, which interlinks with state, structural and systemic factors and influences policy-making, illustrative of the gap and the motivation for this research to evaluate the potential of, and limits on, civil-society in Turkey, adding to the study of TFP.

#### **4. Literature and Theory**

Studies on TFP often focus purely on the systemic or the structural, meaning that the role of domestic variables has been neglected and underdeveloped. While there has been a proliferation of literature regarding the democratizing impact of interest groups and civil-society, particularly in the EU accession bid, as well as literature citing the influence of the EU as an actor influencing TFP which will be explored in the historical overview, this research has not been extended to analyse the role of these domestic dynamics in non-EU contexts from a bottom-up rather than top-down perspective (i.e exploring the role of Turkish civil-society

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<sup>20</sup> See J.Goldstein and R.Keohane. eds., 1993. Ideas and foreign-policy: beliefs, institutions, and political change. Cornell University Press.

<sup>21</sup> M,Heper. Strong state and economic interest groups: the post-1980 Turkish experience. De Gruyter,1991, p.6.

rather than EU conditionality).<sup>22</sup> Moreover, aside from EU relations, this literature focuses almost exclusively on civil-society impact on the domestic sphere, particularly on the democratization process, reaffirming the earlier rationale for selecting organizations focused on the Middle East, as a niche but growing area. Literature on civil-society in the Middle East largely concludes that civil-society has become a tool of elites, fulfilling its purpose as a pressure-release valve but unable to have a real impact on political reform due to issues of autonomy and weak institutionalization.<sup>23</sup> Whilst this is an increasingly accurate portrayal of the domestic sphere in Turkey, with hard-won civil-society reforms rapidly being reversed, due to changes in the legal framework for associations working abroad in the early 2000s, the sphere of foreign relations can provide more fruitful empirical evidence of autonomous civil-society influence outside of repressive domestic conditions.

Limits on prior research derive from two core issues. The first problem is a lack of bottom-up research from the perspective of civil-society rather than policy makers. There have been increasing studies noting this void such as Ellen Lust-Okar and Saloua Zerhouni who argue that the more research is needed on the agency of social actors in the MENA region.<sup>24</sup> The second problem is the almost unilateral focus on democracy-promotion as the *raison d'être* for CSOs, to the detriment of research on organizations working at a regional or international level on issues such as aid, poverty, political reform, education, health and economic development. Consequently, this thesis will analyse the multiple facets of Turkey's changing political culture since 2002 to understand if, and when societal actors and norms have had an impact on foreign relations, largely from the perspective of CSOs. This includes a multifaceted exploration of the domestic variables impacting on CSOs' agency, particularly the balance of power within the government, civil-military relations, the democratic capacity of the government, relations with civil-society actors, and more generally, the socio-political environment in which they are immersed. These factors are the primary independent variables impact on CSO behaviour and impact. By understanding how these variables have allowed for a gradual opening in the political space, this dissertation seeks to contribute to literature on civil-society impact as well as TFP decision-making and transformation under the AKP.

Traditionally, definitions of foreign-policy have been highly state-centric, leaving little room for analysis of the role of non-state actors. Globalization and economic liberalization however expanded both the scope of foreign-policy and the actors involved in it, with foreign relations

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<sup>22</sup> See M.Muftuler-Baç and Y.Gursoy, "Is There a Europeanization of Turkish Foreign-policy? An Addendum to the Literature on EU Candidates," *Turkish Studies* 11, issue. 3 (2010): 405-427.

<sup>23</sup> See for example, I.Brouwer, "Weak Democracy and Civil-society Promotion: The Cases of Egypt and Palestine," in M.Ottaway and T.Carothers, eds., *Funding Virtue: Civil-society Aid and Democracy Promotion* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000; S.Yom, "Civil-society and Democratization in the Arab World," *MERIA* 9, no. 4 (2005).

<sup>24</sup> E.Lust-Okar and S.Zerhouni, eds., *Political Participation in the Middle East* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2008), p.262



more accurately describing the number of activities pursued, including economic, humanitarian and cultural relations. It is argued that CSOs, as newly empowered actors, have emerged as an aspect of what Strange termed 'new diplomacy'.<sup>25</sup> Given the potential roles and strategies civil-society actors have employed in Turkey, particularly in framing foreign-policy issues and communicating with the public sphere, as well as mobilizing resources for internationalized agendas, they can indeed be portrayed as the new diplomats. Similarly, Jacobsen theorizes the inclusion of societal ideas as an independent variable that determines the political dynamics between policy-makers, institutions and the public sphere. Applicably, he argues that non-elite ideas play an influential, if situational role in determining foreign economic policies due to their ability to frame events, and because policy-makers need to coordinate with certain interest groups and not to alienate their electorate by failing to fulfil their economic (or in the case of this thesis, also social/ ethical) needs.<sup>26</sup> The definition of foreign-policy used in this thesis will as such be an expansive one, including both 'high foreign-policy' and focusing on 'low foreign-policy', the former detailing security issues and the latter covering ideational, economic and social ones, including democracy promotion, as well as humanitarian work and education. Aside from in instances of specific foreign-policy decisions, foreign relations will be used as more holistic term encompassing the broad range of activities which have come to constitute the AKP's 'new' regional activism.

Richard Rosecrance's conceptualization of the trading state lends credence to many of contentions of this thesis regarding Turkey's 'new' regional activism. Rosecrance argues that due to the liberalized and internationalized nature of the global economic system, inter-state relations are now characterized by economic interdependence and thus, must be negotiated through cooperation and dialogue: economic statecraft, rather than the hard-power tools of the realist anarchic world view.<sup>27</sup> Further to this, Putnam asserts that rapprochement and reconciliation efforts are a 'two level game' in which domestic level social-actors interact with state and international interests. This developing state-society partnership was arguably the model in Turkey's foreign relations for much of the early 2000s.<sup>28</sup> Ziya Öniş produced an excellent critique of this partnership however, in his analysis of the impact of systemic forces such as economic globalization and neoliberal restructuring on eroding state sovereignty and subsequent diffusion of authority, in part, to Islamic capital.<sup>29</sup> Although restrained largely to domestic impact, as an approach it certainly supports the arguments made in this thesis

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<sup>25</sup> S.Strange. "The defective state." *Daedalus* (1995): 55-74.

<sup>26</sup> L.Jacobs and B.Page. "Who influences US foreign-policy?." *American Political Science Review* 99, no. 01 (2005): 107-123

<sup>27</sup> R.Rosecrance. *The rise of the trading state: Commerce and conquest in the modern world*. Vol. 386. New York: Basic Books, 1986.

<sup>28</sup> Putnam, Robert D. "Diplomacy and domestic politics: the logic of two-level games." *International organization* 42, no. 03 (1988): 427-460.

<sup>29</sup> Z.Öniş, (1997) 'The political economy of Islamic resurgence in Turkey', *Third World Quarterly*, 18:4, 743–766., p.745.

regarding interest-alignment between economic and Islamic elites based on identity engendering greater access and impact for certain non-state actors and lending greater dynamism and an economic backbone to Turkey's Middle East policy.<sup>30</sup>

These political economy approaches underpin the theoretical motivation for this thesis, in promoting interconnected analysis of the impact of systemic, structural, domestic and individual determinants of foreign-policy, however arguably either fall short in case study research, or in accounting for agent-centric ideational factors rather than external dimensions and domestic economic interests.<sup>31</sup> Kemal Kirişçi's research on Turkey as a trading state builds on these studies, exploring the impact of domestic societal transformations on Turkey's political culture drawing on identity politics and political economy. Although important, Kirişçi's work left large empirical gaps in the research regarding the actual impact of civil-society on foreign-policy. A much more extensive bottom-up analysis of the role and influence of these organizations is required to ascertain whether transformations in Turkish foreign-policy are related to the rise and increasing power of non-state (particularly economic) actors. It is primarily this gap in the research where I situate my research, citing how ideas and material interests converge at an agent-centric domestic level as an explanatory variable in foreign relations, not only in the context of political economy and thus expanding existing studies on TFP and FPA by providing new empirical substance through this novel approach.

Ayşe Buğra's agent-centric political economic analysis of class and interest representation by economic actors too seeks to fill this research gap. Although too focused on the internal domestic dynamics of two economic actors to be holistic in application for this study, comparative analysis of TÜSIAD and MÜSIAD in their difference methods of seeking influence over social and economic development is both theoretically and empirically rewarding. Her analysis of the informal, personal and cultural channels of communication between elites and political authority is revealing of the impact of both organizations' interests and identities, sometimes conflicting with, and sometimes constitutive of the state's social project, and certainly has bearing on this analysis.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, her brief discussion of Europeanization, demilitarization and democratization initiatives being a strategic choice by the business community in their attempts to enforce their own hegemony supports the critique made in chapter three regarding the problematic relationship between economic interests and democracy, but also the broader argument that influence is taking place to begin with, and the conditions meditating this, particularly identity, regardless of normative critiques as to why.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.761.

<sup>31</sup> See Öniş, (1997) *op cit*, for an in-depth discussion of the external factors giving rise to political Islam in Turkey, as well as the rise of identity politics in general through the case of MUSIAD.

<sup>32</sup> A.Buğra (1998) 'Class, culture, and state: an analysis of interest representation by two Turkish business associations', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 30:4, 521–539, p.523

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, pp.525-526

Finally, Buğra notes the context specific nature of business impact on national interest and the impact of different conditions, highlighting first and foremost relationship with the state, supporting the theoretical limitations of this thesis prohibiting cross-country comparisons or model building.

Thus, many of the domestic economic dimensions of Turkey's increasing regional activism have been examined. Ziya Öniş and Fuat Keyman as well as Kemal Kirişçi have all written extensive political economic accounts of regional relations, studies on TFP which possess elements of my research agenda but are usually focussed on the EU or the Caucasus, and centred on systemic explanations. Öniş and Keyman argue that globalization and increasing economic interdependence means that interest groups, in particular business associations, and the state are developing a more interactive relationship in Turkey which is impacting on foreign relations.<sup>34</sup> This was found to be the case in this research also, however it was additionally identified that the government relied on civil-society actors (either activities or image) as a way to lend legitimacy and support for their domestic and foreign-policy decisions. Similarly, despite growing interest-alignment between both state and society and market and transnational capital as discussed by Öniş, Buğra and Tuğal, it is argued here that CSOs also seek to participate in the decision-making process to achieve their own interests, whether those be material, ideational or political, which remains an understudied domestic dynamic in the study of TFP.<sup>35</sup> Whilst IR scholars such as Keohane and Milner do focus on the influence of organized interest groups on foreign-policy through a bargaining process with the state, CSOs broader participation in creating a socio-political environment conducive to influence, and autonomous activism outside of state-bargaining has not been addressed in the case of Turkey in a systematic way.<sup>36</sup> This illustrates the research scope and theoretical contribution of this study to TFP and FPA, providing a new, and fruitful explanatory variable drawing on social constructivist, historical materialist and sociological theories used in Turkish studies and IR as will be outlined below.

Thus, despite existing studies, holistic work on the influence of civil-society is extremely limited, and there remains an even more conspicuous gap in the literature regarding the role of CSOs specifically in Middle Eastern foreign relations. Nevertheless, the approach proposed in this study is not viewed as a replacement of these studies, but rather as complimentary, adding to the broader study of TFP and FPA what cannot be understood by looking purely at

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<sup>34</sup> See Fuat Keyman, and Ahmet İçduygu. "Globalization, civil-society and citizenship in Turkey: actors, boundaries and discourses." *Citizenship Studies* 7, no. 2 (2003): 219-234; Öniş and Türem, 2001, op cit and Ziya Öniş, and Umut Türem, 'Entrepreneurs, democracy, and citizenship in Turkey', *Comparative Politics*, 34(4), 2002, pp. 439-456.

<sup>35</sup> Öniş, (1997), op cit., p.747.

<sup>36</sup> Keohane, Robert O, and Helen V. Milner, eds. *Internationalization and domestic politics*. Cambridge University Press, 1996

structural or systemic factors. To that end, I have chosen to explore the question of civil-society's role in foreign relations by incorporating domestic determinants into a broader analysis of change and continuity in Turkey's Middle East foreign-policy under the AKP, identifying the synthesis between domestic, systemic and structural factors in influencing this.<sup>37</sup> My core contention, consistent with scholars such as Keyman, Ayata and Öniş, is that transformations of Turkey's previously isolationist and state-centric political culture, and subsequent foreign-policy activism in MENA, should be perceived as a result of the regional political economy, democratization and desecuritization, as well as identity-politics, which I argue, led to the development of an opening or political space in which civil-society could consolidate its power and begin to play a role in foreign relations, particularly in introducing new diplomatic avenues.<sup>38</sup> Ayata explores this new, value and identity-based domestic-driven foreign-policy in his discussion of Turkey's attempts to consolidate itself as a regional power in response to the Arab Spring. This legitimacy process utilizing identity, civil society and soft-power instruments will be explored at length in this study, however located prior to Ayata's analysis, in the rise of the AKP and preceding structural and systemic transformations.<sup>39</sup> Similar to this study however, I locate the fall of the Turkish model in the growing security concerns and militarization of TFP since 2013 related to the interlinking Kurdish, domestic and Syrian crises, undermining the AKP's claims of 'zero problems' and highlighting the limits of soft-power and civil society activism as a strategy in the face of conflict.<sup>40</sup>

In contrast to this, but in line with the historical scope and theoretical approach taken here of exploring state-society relations through the articulation and constitutive force of new power blocs in economics, politics and culture, Cihan Tuğal's insightful Gramscian historical analysis roots the fall of the Turkish model and the mobilization of Islam at the liberalizing turn of the 1990s. Tuğal's understanding of how the Turkish model was historically and societally constructed, described as 'Islamic Liberalism', also bears comparison to this thesis' exploration of civil-society empowerment under the AKP regarding the mobilization of societal resources (including depoliticized business, cultural structures and civil-society) under the auspices of democratization and economic development. Tuğal raises key issues of how the demise of Islamic liberalism has been handled in scholarship, with analyses predominantly dealing with external factors or falling into cultural relativism, of which this

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<sup>37</sup> Other literature has approached these three factors systematically, however not in the context of the Middle East. See Ş. Çalış I. Dağı. and R. Gözen (eds). 2001. *Türkiye'nin Dış Politika Gündemi: Kimlik, Demokrasi, Güvenlik* (Turkey's Foreign-policy Agenda: Identity, Democracy, Security). Ankara: Liberte Yayınları.

<sup>38</sup> Öniş (1997) op cit., p.744.

<sup>39</sup> B.Ayata, (2015) 'Turkish foreign policy in a changing Arab world: rise and fall of a regional actor?' *Journal of European Integration*, 37:1, 95–112., p.95.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p.98.

study hopes to build upon with its comprehensive exploration of the constitutive power of domestic dynamics as the novel element in TFP.<sup>41</sup> Tuğal notes growing competition, and a merging of interests of both domestic and foreign financial capital, also discussed by Marxist political economist Thomas Marois, as influential in changing power relations under the AKP, making the state more responsive to the priorities of financial capital.<sup>42</sup> Marois' subsequent historical materialist account of how social economy should be democratized is mirrored in chapter three on the activism of business associations in social development, however due to the continued empirical focus on agency and identity in this study rather than theoretical discussion of finance capital dynamics, is not engaged with at length.<sup>43</sup> Instead, this thesis explores how these actors behave and interact during the rise of a hegemonic 'liberal-conservatism' as described by Tuğal, arguing that the neoliberal democratic model in Turkey and consequent interest-alignment across state and society enabled the emergence of new elites who, once empowered, developed independent identities and interests, even if part of the historic bloc identified by Tuğal, which has had a substantial impact on TFP, one that has not been explored specifically, mutually or independently in his research.

Although beyond the scope of this study, Tuğal hypothesis regarding the post-2013 elevation of elite (Islamic and financial) interests, exclusionary practices and eventually revolt is briefed in the prologue regarding the Kurdish conflict and Gezi Park as the end of the Turkish model.<sup>44</sup> Throughout, and complimentary to Tuğal's Gramscian discussion of the AKP's role in melding Islamism and neoliberalism in a 'passive revolution', this thesis will explore empirically the role of civil-society mobilization during and after the hegemonic crisis of the state in the 1990s as identified by Tuğal, and question whether, as he theorizes, it has been 'absorbed' into dominant political and economic institutions since the AKP consolidated its ideological, social and economic hegemony. This critique plays out through questions over the democratic capacity of civil-society and its involvement in the state's political project which holds theoretical value for the study of civil-society in Turkey and elsewhere.<sup>45</sup> Where Tuğal's study begins, in this conceptual and theoretical analysis of the 'integration' of domestic dynamics however, I hope to provide the prior empirical research needed for such a critique in terms of the potential and limits of Turkish civil-society in regional dynamics.<sup>46</sup> It is their 'incorporation', and it is argued, influence over the political process as broadly independent actors, rather than on the Marxist critique of the 'absorption' and hegemony of CSOs which

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<sup>41</sup> C.Tugal. (2016). *The fall of the Turkish model: How the Arab uprisings brought down Islamic liberalism*. Verso Books., p.15.

<sup>42</sup> T.Marois, (2012) *States, banks and crisis: emerging finance capitalism in Mexico and Turkey* (Cheltenham:United Kingdom), p.10.

<sup>43</sup> T.Marois, (2012) *Interpreting Emerging Finance Capitalism in Turkey*, Centre for Policy Analysis and Research on Turkey (ResearchTurkey: London) p.2.

<sup>44</sup> Tugal, (2016) *op cit.*, p.143

<sup>45</sup> Tugal, (2009), *op cit.*, p.22.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, p.24.

arguably ignores important internal dynamics at which I seek to base my analysis and where I depart from Tuğal's.<sup>47</sup>

Over emphasizing the role of economic interests, as is the case with many of these studies, should be avoided. Öniş and Kirişçi as well as Faruq Ekmekci and Abdulkadir Yildirim all cite economic interests as the main driving force in TFP, arguing against ideational or ideological explanations.<sup>48</sup> While economics is clearly important, this research and others have identified strong empirical evidence showing that identity is an underlying force in TFP and has a significant impact on the direction, methods and policy-making process. Ekmekci and Yildirim for example argue that if ideological arguments were really taken in to account, then Turkey's Islamist government would likely reduce economic relations with pro-US countries. They used empirical evidence to show the exact reverse trend is true. But this does not account for the balancing act the AKP have maintained in their foreign-policy discourse and practice, using ideological rhetoric to increase their cultural capital in the Middle East whilst using economic and pragmatic arguments for the West. Still recognizing the economic drive in TFP, and arguing this is one of the main causes of expanding relations with the Middle East and regional engagement more broadly, this study aims to adopt a more balanced and holistic approach which acknowledges the multitude of interests and preferences influencing TFP under the AKP as a reflection of both political economy and 'cultural complexity' as identified by Tuğal.<sup>49</sup>

Such an approach can also be found in Hoffmann and Cemgil's account of the social-historical roots of TFP, which as with this thesis, critiques the idea that there is a 'new' foreign-policy to begin with, as well as the 'axis-shift' trope, arguing foreign-policy now and historically, is the product of changing and sometimes competing strategies of reproduction by social actors.<sup>50</sup> This thesis agrees in particular with their theoretical understanding that this relationship cannot be understood causally through traditional FPA or IR frameworks, as with Tuğal's critique of institutionalist and structuralist accounts, and posits that state level foreign-policy transformation can be explained by examining the interplay between embedded social forces, economic and cultural concerns, elite consensus and myriad other factors.<sup>51</sup> As such, and where this thesis departs, I wish to demarcate a space in the scholarship to explore the intersection of these forces not at the state level as with Hoffmann and Cemgil, but specifically at the point of civil-society, using analysis of foreign-policy fluctuation as a method by which

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p.25.

<sup>48</sup> Faruk Emekci, and Abdulkadir Yildirim. "The AKP and the Eastern Turn (?) of Turkey: An Economic Analysis" USAK Yearbook of Politics and International Relations: Volume 5 5 (2012): 37.

<sup>49</sup> Tuğal. (2009)., op cit. p.21.

<sup>50</sup> C. Hoffmann. and C. Cemgil. "The (un)making of the Pax Turca in the Middle East: understanding the social-historical roots of foreign-policy" Cambridge Review of International Affairs 29, no. 4 (2016): 1279-1302., p.1288

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p.1281 and Tuğal, (2009), op cit., p.22.

to determine the societal reproduction and production of Turkey's image as a soft-power, model and regional hegemon in the Middle East through geopolitical, ideational and material discourses and strategies.

Like Yalvaç in his critical realist account of TFP, this thesis does not adhere to overly positivist or abstract accounts which ignore domestic structures, referring to predominantly sociological theories to understand changing dynamics in foreign-policy orientation and emerging hegemonic discourses. As such, contributing to a growing scholarship in IR that explores, rather than specific moments of negotiations, deals and agreements as noted by Yalvaç, the deeper socio-historical structures and particularly, agents involved in foreign-policy-making.<sup>52</sup> Aside from this excellent, although at points too brief theoretical account of the transformational potential of social activities which draws on both Marxist and critical realist theories in uncovering the interests behind ideological configurations, useful in FPA and for the study of TFP specifically, there have been numerous and excellent studies exploring the impact of ideas, interests and threat perceptions in FPA that can be applied to the case of Turkey. The works of Jacobs' comparative analysis of domestic actors' influence on U.S foreign-policy (particularly focussed on internationally orientated business leaders and experts),<sup>53</sup> Risse-Kappen's work on the impact of domestic identities in international relations based on normative values,<sup>54</sup> and Skidmore and Hudson's seminal research on the role of interest conflicts, intersubjective understandings of identity and social-organizational influences on foreign-policy are reflective of the constructivist FPA literature in which I hope to situate myself and contribute to.<sup>55</sup> In terms of the implications for IR theory then, and FPA more specifically, this means that the more dominant explanations of TFP such as geopolitics or security must be rooted in the multiplicity of social determinants which form these conceptualizations. Similarly, and as argued by Yalvaç and earlier, Hakan Yavuz in his research on the rise of neo-Ottomanism, the relationship between the domestic and the international must be theoretically grounded, with national interest and foreign-policy being understood as the result of increasingly diverse domestic interests and identity debates not realpolitik or predetermined power struggles.<sup>56</sup> However, I believe to support these theoretical

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<sup>52</sup> F.Yalvaç. (2012). Strategic depth or hegemonic depth? A critical realist analysis of Turkey's position in the world system. *International Relations*, 26(2), 165-180., pp.165-166.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>54</sup> T.Risse-Kappen. "Ideas do not float freely: transnational coalitions, domestic structures, and the end of the cold war." *International Organization* 48, no. 02 (1994): 185-214.

<sup>55</sup> R. Lawrence, and Benjamin I. Page. "Who influences US foreign-policy?." *American Political Science Review* 99, no. 01 (2005): 107-123; T.Risse-Kappen. 1994, op cit; and David Skidmore and Valerie M. Hudson. *The limits of state autonomy: societal groups and foreign-policy formulation*. Westview Press, 1993.

<sup>56</sup> See M.Yavuz. (1998). *Turkish identity and foreign policy in flux: The rise of Neo-Ottomanism*. Critique: Journal for Critical Studies of the Middle East, 7(12), 19-41., for a thorough critique of the applicability of realist frameworks to understanding TFP.

claims, we need first to provide the substance outlining this relationship, societal transformations which enabled it and the socio-historical discourses framing it.

My core contribution then will be to identify empirically if and when the interests and the ideas held by civil-society actors operate as functional aspects of Turkey's foreign relations, which holds theoretical value for the study of identity in IR due to the detailed exploration of the channels and methods of influence. Assessing how social actors communicate their ideational and material interests to the state, and the subsequent activities of both civil-society and state actors, proposing this as a viable explanation of foreign-policy change. However, the tendency to 'fly your theoretical flag' in Turkey and elsewhere has, I argue, restricted synthesized research. Where most studies on TFP swing between the rationalist,<sup>57</sup> neo-realist or geopolitical,<sup>58</sup> and constructivist schools of thought,<sup>59</sup> and have contributed substantial research in doing so, uncovering structural, geographical and strategic causes of transformation in TFP which will be explored at length in the historical overview, the importance of domestic dynamics is often neglected.<sup>60</sup> Due to this need to understand the domestic outside of these traditional frameworks used to understand TFP, as well as the rise of constructivist accounts of TFP espoused by Turkish decision-makers such as Davutoğlu, this bulk of this analysis falls broadly into the social constructivist school, most adept in uncovering what is 'new' in TFP along the lines of societally-grounded identity, values, and norms.<sup>61</sup> The world-systems perspectives introduced by Çağlar Keyder in his seminal book on state and class in Turkey is also useful here in synthesising these multiple strands, locating the turning point in societal mobilization of political projects in developing economic power, a central theme addressed in this thesis. Although the centrality of Marxist class-analysis in Ottoman history means this research is largely outside of my scope, the main methodological approach of exploring how national historical class struggle and attempts to attain, maintain and employ state power impacts upon the political balance and world order certainly holds analytical value. As does the theoretical approach combining history, political economy and sociology in an attempt to understand relations between internal social movements (CSOs in this case) and the external context (foreign relations).<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> See W.Hale, *Turkish Foreign-policy in the Post-Cold War Era*, edited by İ.Bal; M.Kutlay, "Economy as the 'Practical Hand' of 'New Turkish Foreign-policy': A Political Economy Explanation," *Insight Turkey* 13, no. 1 (2011): 67-88.

<sup>58</sup> See J.Merhiemer, "Turkish Foreign-policy: A Realist's Assessment," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 4, 2012, accessed October 5, 2015, Accessed through: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=geC1vNBj2Yk>; and A. Davutoğlu. (2001), *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* (Strategic Depth: The International Position of Turkey), (Istanbul: Küre Yayınları),

<sup>59</sup> Y.Bozdağlıoğlu. (2003), *Turkish Foreign-policy and Turkish Identity: A Constructivist Approach*, (New York: Routledge).

<sup>60</sup> Yalvaç, op cit, p.167.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p.169.

<sup>62</sup> Ç.Keyder. (1987). *State and class in Turkey*. London., pp.3-5.



Thus, the theoretical framework used does not subscribe to any singular tradition but rather applies and advocates for theoretical pluralism, relating this bottom-up analysis of the mobilization and hegemony of societal actors to the aforementioned geopolitical, structural and strategic frameworks which also has bearing on Marxist and critical realist accounts. The theoretical framework then melds elements of political economy, historical materialism and sociology to explore, empirically where possible, social relations and influence, if not causality. As such, this study holds an ontological depth needed in IR according to Yalvaç, locating foreign-policy in the dynamics of social relations and surpassing positivist restrictions on FPA. Applying social constructivism as well as borrowing from other theoretical traditions which focus on bottom-up analysis allows more flexibility as a ‘middle ground’ framework that accepts these interlinking and often contradictory social relations generating interest and identity in TFP. Following scholars such as Wendt, Barnett and Checkel, who emphasize the use of critical and interpretivist methodologies to reach specific conclusions (rather than generalizable ones) about how identities and interest effect state behaviour, this research explores points of influence for civil-society. This allows bridge-building between the various approaches used to explain TFP. In the case of this thesis, analysis of the dialectic interplay between material interests and identity, and the ideology of new elites in affecting foreign relations, which holds theoretical relevance for the study of both TFP and civil-society relating to historical materialist and sociological theories on the power relationship between state and society put forth by Gramsci, Robert Cox and later, Thomas Marois in terms of the democratization of capital.<sup>63</sup>

The preferences of differential social groups will consequently be taken into account and the interplay between interest and identity will be adopted and adapted as a framework to understand the various actors forming a new historical bloc in TFP, their motivations and strategies, critiquing, as Gramsci does, the possibilities and limitations of CSOs as agents of the state’s political project (hegemonic or otherwise). The purpose of examining contrary organizations is thus, as it is a helpful tool in identifying the role and intersection of material circumstances, identities and values in shaping foreign-policy preferences and thus, once again, has theoretical value for both TFP and FPA in providing a social rather than positivist or purely constructivist basis of analysis.<sup>64</sup> In doing so, it adds to a growing historical sociological literature on TFP through the specific and systematic focus on civil-society, avoiding the type of mechanical descriptions of ‘domestic sources’ and ‘structural conditions’

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<sup>63</sup> See R.Cox, ‘Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 10(2), 1981, pp. 126–55.; A.Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971) and Marois, *op cit*.

<sup>64</sup> R.Cox. *Approaches to world order*. No. 40. Cambridge University Press, 1996. p.132

of foreign-policy critiqued by Yalvaç, expanding on the societal changes since the 1980s as both constitutive of, and challenging to, the AKP's hegemonic aspirations.<sup>65</sup>

While literature on civil-society and its impact on foreign relations in Turkey is almost non-existent, there is a small but growing body of literature on peacebuilding and conflict resolution.<sup>66</sup> This literature centres on cases of track I and track II diplomacy and like this thesis, looks at the interactivity of multiple strands of diplomacy, not just from elites but societies and CSOs. Although insufficient as a broad theoretical framework, the main concepts and approach towards the possible role and influence of CSOs is derived from literature on multi-track diplomacy. Within the predominant theories of Diamond and McDonald, track I and track II diplomacy will be the main two addressed here out of nine identified by these scholars.<sup>67</sup> For track I, 'the world of official diplomacy, policymaking, and peacebuilding', shows how policy makers operate internationally and domestically – using multilateral treatise, international institutions and various other official political activities to influence politics. Track II also plays an interlocker role between tracks I and III – which includes community and business-based advocates – helping to transgress domestic and social divides independent from political elites, as well as linking local, national, regional and international relationships. Track II is most important to this thesis as according to Joseph Moteville, it encompasses individual acts across borders and regions by groups of non-governmental actors attempting to develop strategies for conflict resolution, prevention and peacebuilding.<sup>68</sup> As a strategy, track II relies on a long-term approach towards bilateral relations. It also hinges on a changing mentality which posits human need and collaboration as the centre of international relations. In discourses at the very least, this is a mentality which was increasingly referred to across the political spectrum in Turkey, in large part by practitioners, educators, activists and scholars, but it is also entering the policy-making lexicon under the AKP under the auspices of civilian capacity. Turkey's U-turn following the various crises of 2011 and onwards shows the limits of track II diplomacy, but also a possible strategy for the future as track I diplomatic efforts in the region fail to make the necessary headway with governments or publics in Turkey, Syria, and Israel amongst others.

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<sup>65</sup> Hoffmann and Cemgil, op cit., p.1282 and T.Marois, (2012), op cit., p.1.

<sup>66</sup> See K.Harpviken., and K Kjellman. 2004. "Beyond Blueprints–Civil-society and Peacebuilding. PRIO International Peace Research Institute, Concept Paper commissioned by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), Oslo; A.Ohanyan., with Lewis, J. 2005. "Politics of Peacebuilding: Critical Evaluation of Interethnic Contact and Peace Education in Georgia-Abkhaz Peace Camp, 1998-2002," *Peace and Change*, 30 (1), 57-84; and O.Richmond., and H.Carey. 2006. *Subcontracting Peace. NGOs and Peacebuilding in a Dangerous World*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

<sup>67</sup> Louise Diamond, and John W. McDonald. *Multi-track diplomacy: A systems approach to peace*. West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1996.

<sup>68</sup> Joseph Montville. (1987). "The Arrow and the Olive Branch: A Case for Track Two Diplomacy and Society in Cyprus Diplomacy," in J. McDonald & D. Bendahmane, eds, *Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*. Washington, DC: Foreign Service Institute, US Department of State.

Much of the scholarship mentioned above note that literature on Turkish foreign-policy has not devoted sufficient attention to socio-economic factors. As such, this thesis will offer an examination of these arguments, particularly in chapter three on business associations, but upholding a critical approach towards the singularity of economic and particularly exogenous analysis by predominantly pursuing agent-centric analysis, exploring the intersection of interest and identity in Turkish civil-society to offer a novel explanation of TFP towards the Middle East under the AKP.

## **5. Research Design, Sources and Limitations**

A major research strategy of this thesis is to compare and contrast the identities and interests of CSOs in Turkey with foreign-policy practices and attitudes expressed by policy makers, identified as the main condition determining level of influence. However, it is very difficult to determine a direct or causal link between CSOs and singular foreign-policy decisions as there are very few formal mechanisms of consultation or cooperation, as such, this thesis will not generally examine issue-specific decision-making, but rather a constellation of decisions related to Turkey's developing MENA policy between 2002 and 2013, to identify whether TFP is 'new' in its orientation and strategies. Specifically, I will identify key moments of negotiation and change in Turkey's bilateral relations/ rapprochement efforts, citing the institutional relationship between the Turkish government and civil-society actors, and the process of bargaining, deliberation and negotiation this entails, as influential in Turkey's new activism in the Middle East. These moments, such as the lead up to the 2009 lifting of visa requirements and the formation of the High Level Strategic Cooperation Council (HLSCC) and northern Iraqi normalization will be discussed and evaluated to determine how civil-society actors' input have served as a mechanism for governments to manage and implement socio-economic structural changes in bilateral relations. The cut-off point chosen as 2013 insofar as the complex and unstable political situation over the border reversed many of the AKP's chosen policies, strategies and actors in foreign relations and led to a transition from activism to interventionist foreign-policy.

Turkey is an interesting case that will merit from comparative historical analysis regarding alternative explanations of foreign-policy changes since the 1980s. A comparative historical perspective raises a more interesting range of questions regarding how civil-society's role has evolved in this context. How have their preferences shifted towards more active cultural, political, economic and humanitarian engagement with the Middle East? What is the impact of their ideational characteristics on their public and foreign-policy agenda? How can their increased participation in democratic reforms be explained and what are the implications of this for the future of state-society relations? Turkey's activism in MENA cannot be explained

without examining the convergence of ideational factors and material interests at the domestic/ societal level, as well as structural environmental opportunities and constraints which are enabling and legitimizing policy change, particularly the use of soft-power (often civil-society) as an instrument of foreign-policy.

The Middle East was chosen as the case study for this research for multiple reasons. Despite Turkey's civil-society being more active in relations with the EU and Africa, and their role in conflict resolution with Greece, Cyprus and Armenia, the Middle East is both an understudied area and an area of interest in discovering the 'new' components of Turkish foreign-policy under the AKP. Whilst relations with the EU have been explored exhaustively under rationalist frameworks of economy, security and democratization,<sup>69</sup> as well as constructivist accounts of Turkey's Europeanization, the same cannot be said for the Middle East from a civil-society perspective. Moreover, with the re-emergence of identity as a tangible factor in Turkish foreign-policy (although it will subsequently be argued this has been a staple of TFP), this research can provide interesting case studies to enhance our understanding of the dynamics and interplay between security, the economy, interest and identity. Syria, northern Iraq and Israel/ Palestine were selected as the case studies for this thesis. They are most representative of the different challenges, variables and diversity of actors influencing state-level foreign-policy preferences; as atypical cases demanding atypical explanations for change in TFP towards the Middle East. However, there are also elements of thematic continuity (namely rapprochement efforts and conflict resolution activities) which allow for useful comparative analysis. Furthermore, as contentious and complex issues, bilateral relations with these countries were previously highly securitized and monopolized by the policy-making elite. The salience, complexity and uncertainty of these cases, according to literature on interest groups and epistemic communities, means that there are strong incentives for policy officials to utilize to expert resources, making them important case studies.<sup>70</sup>

This thesis presents the views of civil-society actors, academics and politicians regarding the evolution and role of CSOs in Turkey. As discussed in section three on organizations and scope, I have specifically chosen organizations with a Middle East orientation. This precludes some of Turkey's oldest and entrenched civil-society actors such as the Foreign-policy Institute as they continue to lobby and advice on traditional western-orientated security perspectives as well as a number of smaller, community-based CSOs who do not have either accessible information or sufficient capacity to hold significant empirical value for this

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<sup>69</sup> See M.Altunışık. 2004. "Redefinition of Turkish Security Policies in the Middle East After the Cold War." In A.Karaosmanoglu and S.Tasha eds, *The Europeanisation of Turkey's Security Policy: Prospects and Pitfalls*, 213-232. Ankara: Foreign-policy Institute; and M.Aydın. 2005. "Determinants of Turkish Foreign-policy and Turkey's European Vocation." In G.Nonneman. *Analyzing Middle East Foreign Policies and the Relations with Europe*, 197-223 New York: Routledge.

<sup>70</sup> Jacobs and Page, op cit.

research. Preliminary field work was conducted from September 2012 until June 2013, during which I worked for the International Strategic Research Organization (USAK) and Bilkent University. This period helped me identify the dominant actors and organisations working in the Middle East, as well as the various independent variables mediating influence in the country. PhD field work was conducted intermittently from January 2014 until October 2016 in Istanbul and Ankara as the cities where most large CSOs are based. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with multiple organizations and interviewees from each identified CSO sector as discussed in section one, and based primarily on access and availability. As well as primary sources from interview data, primary data was collected from their organization's databases, legal documents, policy reports and political and economic agreements between Turkey and the selected case study countries, as well as the European Union. The data was gathered through document analysis, publications and internal documents from the organizations under examination such as member profiles, official bulletins, policy reports, speeches and mission statements, semi-structured interviews with the organizations' leadership and finally, through participant observation, attending the conferences and meetings of some of the organizations listed. The evidence and information presented was gathered from cross-referencing interviews, documents and secondary sources, used to substantiate the validity of the findings and interpretation methods.

The main themes of the interview were chosen based on this literature, as well as the research questions identified above. Although they were semi-structured and left open to development based on interviewee responses during field work, each interview consisted of five main topics. First, Turkish political culture and transformations due to EU conditionality and democratization. Second, Turkish foreign-policy towards the Middle East. Third, actors and institutions involved in policy-making. Fourth, changes in these actors, as well as the strategies and preferences under the AKP. Finally, impact of said actors and civil-society activism in changing relations with the Middle East. Questions were refined based on the interviewees' individual background, particularly when they held personal relations with governmental actors. This line of questioning addressed all the main research questions, the contextual/environmental opportunities and constraints on these emerging actors as well as the relationship between foreign-policy and civil-society actors. As outlined in section three on scope, the sample group was identified based on their level of visibility, engagement, publications and links with state officials and the media. Interviews were conducted with multiple people within the institutions to be more representative, including 32 interviews and informal conversations with NGO representatives, government official, journalists, academics and humanitarian actors as well as primary documents from the organizations themselves. The selection criteria was based upon research identifying the main actors in the field, particularly the leadership and decision-makers of these organizations. Through analysis of interview data

as well as published materials, specific finding will be discussed, both in terms of CSOs' categorization (GNGO, BNGO, InNGO), relations with the government and policy outputs.

CSO interview data was complemented by interviews and discussions with academics specializing in civil-society such as Erhan Doğan, Erhan Kelesoğlu, Mensur Akgun, Serhat Güvenç and Gencer Ozcan. Interviewees were identified based on their research publications and involvement (both personal and professional) with civil-society and foreign-policy-making, thus once again based upon engagement, public visibility and access. Both the academic and CSO interviewees were predominantly high-level, either the president or chairperson, or else specialists with expertise on the Middle East. They have additionally been commissioned by policy makers to inform, lobby for or participate in foreign-policy issues such as mediation negotiations, or track II conflict resolution activities. These interviews were additionally supported by further email communication, participant observation during conferences and at the institutes and private correspondence with a network of journalists, specialists and representatives working in this field. This research was further substantiated by my personal experience working at USAK and Research Turkey, a London-based think tank with strong ties to CSOs in Turkey, all of which was conducted between 2013 and 2016.

The data for this thesis was collected largely using qualitative methods, chosen for its capacity to explain how and why particular events occurred using verbal or literary evidence.<sup>71</sup> To rectify for issues within data collection during interviews, namely lack of access to some organizations and limited access to certain primary resources due to confidentiality, this thesis draws on a wide range of secondary sources on aid, peace-building and mediation, complemented with limited literature on humanitarian and public diplomacy as relatively new research topics. Quantitative data were also used to highlight Turkey's economic condition however, identifying and illustrating changing relations with the Middle East through graphs, figures and tables on imports and exports with the selected countries. Analysis of published material was heavily relied upon in this research insofar as it is not possible to obtain access to most internal documents. Content analysis of interstate economic and political agreements was used where possible however, to identify corresponding themes and debates within civil-society groups. Further, this research used data from the Turkish Statistical Institute, the Turkish Parliament and numerous public opinion polls by KONDA and TESEV. Data collected through fieldwork was largely used in the empirical discussion of impact of CSOs, however there were some broader findings regarding state-society relations and the representation of interest for CSOs.

Further, I conducted textual analysis of brochures, magazine and various edited volumes collected from CSOs to identify the main activities and aims of the organizations discussed

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<sup>71</sup> Ritchie and Spencer, 1994

here. Collection samples were additionally taken from in-depth searches through the archives of CSOs, drawing additional material from these actors' editorials, op-eds, policy papers, and guest lectures. By diversifying samples in this way, a more complete picture of the types of work, agendas and themes of CSOs work can be formed. This was complemented with thorough newspaper analysis from across the social spectrum in both Turkish and English from the 1990s to 2013. A further issue arose from these sources. Media data in Turkey invariably has a political bias. The main newspapers are divided down ideological lines. As such, sources from across the political spectrum were used. This includes, but is not limited to sources from Hürriyet, Milliyet, Radikal, Zaman, Cumhuriyet and Sabah. Whilst Cumhuriyet, Hürriyet and Milliyet are traditional nationalist/ secular papers, Radikal is leftist, Zaman is an extension of the Gülen movement and Sabah is in essence, a government newspaper. Furthermore, during the course of this research, Zaman and Radikal have been closed, which includes the removal of their online archives. Cumhuriyet's archives have also been substantially reduced, limiting research at points.

The partisan and polarized nature of the Turkish political climate, as well as the environmental context of wide-spread civil protests and the general elections created a tense background for research. Interviewees tended to be much more critical of foreign-policy matters as well as the position of civil-society than they were during preliminary research conducted prior to Gezi Park in December 2012. Although this does not necessarily negate the validity of the data, government supporters and their critics both tended towards the extreme, either aggrandizing the role of civil-society exponentially or denying any role at all. Furthermore, and although useful, face-to-face interviews were often not as helpful as hoped as participants enter such interviews with their own agenda which has an impact on the viability and accuracy of the data obtained. Additionally, my lack of personal association with any of the organizations as well as my status as a western female researcher operating largely in conservative male-dominated settings may well have inhibited data collection, as was the case with MÜSİAD and TUSKON, conservative organizations with whom I was unable to gain access, although equally in some instances, may have encouraged interviewees to be more open than they would otherwise have been.

One of the possible critiques of this thesis is that if civil-society actors indeed have the same interests as the AKP, are they are having an influence at all? Indeed, there is a mutually-beneficial organic relationship, between conservative organizations such as MÜSİAD and the AKP, and a 'revolving door' policy by which many MÜSİAD members have joined the AKP and vice versa. However, this does not negate the fact there is an influence but rather that there is conflict. Although there is an abundance of literature which portrays civil-society as a source of resistance to the state, this conceptualization has increasingly been contested, particularly within Marxist and neo-Gramscian theories as discussed above. Although these actors were

often found to play an instrumental role determined by the pre-existing policy-framework as designed by the state, that does not mean that this role is unimportant. It is not the aim of this thesis to provide a theoretical critique of civil-society activism in the Turkish context, but rather to explore whether such activism has indeed taken place and critique the empirical impact of this on TFP within a specific moment in history and a specific region, the Middle East. The input, channels of communications/ interaction and transmission of the interests and needs of CSOs has increased exponentially under the AKPs jurisdiction and remains understudied. Consequently, to gain a complete understanding of the nature of foreign relations under the AKP, questioning which actors and to what degree they are involved through systematic qualitative and quantitative analysis will be conceptually and empirically rewarding.

## **6. Thesis Outline**

Following the introduction which has cited the core body of literature which this study seeks to develop on and apply to new contexts, this research consists of six chapters. Chapter Two, Change and Continuity in Turkish Foreign-policy, aims at identifying whether the AKP has indeed developed a 'new' activism in the Middle East. This chapter is important to put the following research into context, providing a comparative historical analysis of Turkey's relations with the Middle East, primarily under Turgut Özal, Ismail Cem and Necmettin Erbakan's leadership, but briefing on World War II and Cold War policy toward the Middle East under successive Republican administrations in section one. Section two then covers change and continuity in TFP specifically towards northern Iraq, Syria and Israel/ Palestine during these eras, then citing policy changes under the AKP to identify what is 'new' in TFP. Section three details the transformative conditions: desecuritization, economic liberalization, identity and the EU impacting on Turkey's involvement in the Middle East. These processes offer a necessary background to understanding what is 'new' in TFP towards the Middle East.

Chapter Three, Business Associations: Tool or Actor in Turkey's Middle East Relations? details the growing involvement and characteristics of economic interest groups in foreign relations and critiques their involvement vis-à-vis the state's hegemonic neoliberal project. Section one explores the evolution of economic interests in foreign relations: focussing on how EU reform and desecuritization, through liberalization of Turkey's political, economic and legislative systems, paved the way for an economic rather than security based paradigm in Turkey's relations with the Middle East. Section two will then explore the characteristics and aims of economic interest groups, going on to assess specific initiatives and the corresponding foreign-policy practices of the state, within the context of expanding diplomatic and economic ties with the Middle East. Notable foreign-policy changes, including trade



policies, embassy expansion and visa liberalization policies towards the Middle East are also assessed in the second section of the chapter in case study format, within the context of business associations' involvement with Syria, northern Iraq and Israel/ Palestine. The third section will critically assess the limitations of business-led foreign relations and the increasingly partisan and patrimonial exclusionary practices of the state, which contributes to the overall assessment of how, and to what extent civil-society can impact on foreign relations, their autonomy and their interests.

Chapter Four, Think Tanks: The Intellectual Backbone of Turkish Foreign-policy? explores the role of think tank-led education initiatives in democratization, conflict resolution and peace-building in the Middle East, which have taken the form of un-official and official track II diplomacy in Turkey's regional relations under the AKP. This chapter details these initiatives within the broader context of the Turkish model, and Turkey's demonstrative effect on the Middle East: primarily in northern Iraq, Syria and Palestine. Section one first offers a historical overview of the evolution of think tank culture in Turkey, followed by a categorization of these organizations based on their interests, relations with the government and other organizations and agenda. Section two details the strategies used by think tanks in seeking influence: providing civilian experts, informing, agenda setting, communication and generating new ideas. The third section details the characteristics and activities of the three types of think tanks: GNGOs, BNGOs and InNGOs, identifying and critiquing instances of influence. The final section critically explores the limits of influence for Turkish think tanks, detailing the social, economic and environmental restrictions.

Chapter Five, Faith-based NGOs: Turkey's Humanitarian Diplomats, will first introduce the main themes of this chapter: soft-power and humanitarian diplomacy. Section one details the historical evolution of faith-based NGOs in Turkey; their identity in relation to faith-based and humanitarian discourses, and relationship with the government. Section two then details state-level initiatives in foreign aid and humanitarian diplomacy, then exploring the role of non-state actors, firstly the Hizmet Community and then NGOs in this stated change in foreign-policy image and strategy. Section three critically analyses the regional involvement and discourses of four faith-based NGOs' track II diplomatic initiatives in humanitarian aid towards the Middle East. It critiques their influence and autonomy from the AKP based on the predominance of shared socio-moral values and outlook on foreign-policy issues. The final section addresses the limits of influence in Turkey's 'civilian capacity' as a humanitarian diplomat, as contingent on faith-based NGOs.

The thesis concludes with Chapter Six. In light of this research, it offers conclusions to the three research questions provided above: on whether there has indeed been a transformation in Turkey's foreign-policy towards the Middle East, the role of civil-society in this change and

offers some general conclusions on the potential and limitations of civil-society actors. It also returns to the theoretical background discussed in this chapter to identify how it was beneficial in identifying and understanding the main phenomena addressed in this research. The originality of this study, challenges and scope for further research will additionally be detailed. Finally, the conclusion briefly discusses the radical transformations of Turkey's domestic and regional environment since the research cut-off point of 2013. This chapter explores the rise and demise of Turkey's democratic experiment with civil-society in relation to the corresponding end of the civil-economic power paradigm which it has been argued dominated first three terms of AKP rule, and the subsequent re-securitization of policy debates over Israel, northern Iraq and in particular, Syria.

## Chapter Two

### Change and Continuity in Turkish Foreign-policy

Chapter two explores transformation in Turkish foreign-policy (hereon TFP), from Securitization to Rapprochement in historical context. With the AKP's ascension to power came a new framework and a deepening of relations with the Middle East, where culture, historical responsibility and Turkey's Ottoman past have become defining features of Turkey's renewed engagement with the region. This chapter agrees with analyses that TFP has taken a more active and multidimensional approach. However, it critiques the 'novelty' of this under the AKP by raising elements of continuity from previous eras, in particular from the 1990s during which Turkey first began to seek good neighbourly relations and used soft-power tools. This period was chosen as it represents the most significant turning point in TFP prior to the election of the AKP, however was still characterized by hard-power, securitization and the enduring dominance of the military. The transition from securitized relations to economic and cultural ones consolidated under the AKP, and accompanying contestation over the identity and worldview of Turkey, is the overarching topic explored in this chapter. This historical overview then forms the basis for the coming chapters to examine the causes, but largely the consequences of such a transformation in foreign-policy towards the Middle East: providing the historical context needed to understand the rising activism and influence of non-state actors as the 'new' element of TFP.

Much has been written and theorized over the past few decades about the 'transformation' and 'change' in Turkish foreign-policy under the Justice and Development Party (AKP).<sup>72</sup> Following rapprochement efforts, Turkey has emerged as an important player in the Middle East, a mediator in various regional conflicts, most notably, the Arab-Israeli conflict, joined numerous multilateral organizations and contributed peacekeeping forces across the Muslim world. Moreover, entrenched historical conflicts with Turkey's bordering countries, Greece, Armenia, Syria and Iraq, came uniquely close to full normalization during the AKP's first two terms. However, exploring Turkey's regional relations in historical context shows not a 'new' foreign-policy under the AKP, but rather an amplified and extended one based on already evolving domestic, regional and systemic dynamics. The new feature, unique in size and scope to the AKP, being not Turkey's foreign-policy orientation, but rather the actors within it: specifically, the military and non-state actors as will be addressed throughout this thesis.

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<sup>72</sup> See W.Hale. "Turkey and the Middle East in the 'new era'." *Insight Turkey* 11, no. 3 (2009): 143 and C.Dinc, and M.Yetim. "Transformation of Turkish Foreign-policy Toward the Middle East: From Non-Involvement to a Leading Role." *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations* 11, no. 1 (2012); and Z.Önis. "Multiple Faces of the "New" Turkish Foreign-policy: Underlying Dynamics and a Critique." *Insight Turkey* 13, no. 1 (2011): 47.

There were three main phases of TFP following the end of the Cold War which encapsulate broader changes in domestic and regional dynamics: tensions between Islamist and secular establishments, the disintegration of Turkey's Western-facing security and foreign-policy consensus and changing relations with the Middle East due to the aforementioned, moving from conflict to cooperation in a few short years. These phases were led by Turgut Özal (the Motherland Party, Prime Minister 1983-1989, President 1989-1993), Ismail Cem (Democratic Left Party, Foreign Minister 1997-2002), and Necmettin Erbakan (Welfare Party, 1996-1997). Individual leaders rather than parties have been chosen for this analysis as due to the unstable coalition government's which dominated the 1980s and 1990s and continued prominence of the military, these leaders were the most definitive source of concrete foreign-policy changes. This historical analysis will provide the context needed for the final section of this chapter, which details the changing worldview, identity and discourses of TFP both resulting from, and causal in, the AKP's early foreign-policy choices and grandiose narratives of change.

Analysing Turkey's 'new' foreign-policy and changing regional role in historical context reveals distinctive change, but more significantly, strong continuity with that of previous eras. Thus, in exploring the trajectory of TFP towards the Middle East, this chapter will address an underlying but important debate on the presupposition of 'change', exploring the changing domestic, regional and systemic dynamics that facilitated rapprochement with the Middle East. To understand whether there has been 'change', the core features and actors of TFP prior to the AKP must be explored: the military, the Cold War and Kemalist foreign-policy consensus. Section one prefaces the AKP's distinct era in foreign relations by critiquing Turkey's foreign-policy consensus from the inception of the Republic onwards. It then analyses key divergences from this consensus following the end of the Cold War under three civilian government's: Turgut Özal's Motherland Party, (Prime Minister 1983-1989; President 1989-1993), Ismail Cem's Democratic Left Party, (Foreign Minister 1997-2002), and Necmettin Erbakan's Welfare Party (1996-1997). It additionally explores the role of the military under these leaders: the aim of which is to show how the subsequent decline of military power under the AKP opened up foreign-policy-making and allowed new actors – in this context, non-state ones – to influence Turkey's expanding relations with the Middle East. Section two explores the evolution of security-centric relations with three key Middle Eastern states: Israel, Iraq and Syria. Section three will then critique change and continuity in TFP under the AKP, establishing the reasons for the adoption of a more benign, soft-power policy due to desecuritization, EU accession and the AKP's socio-cultural vision of regional integration.

## 1. Geopolitics, the Military and the (in)Security Paradigm

Turkey's geostrategic position has been voiced by policy makers as a source and framework for TFP since the inception of the Republic. The nation exists as a bridge between Asia and Europe and has facilitated Turkey playing a central role in international politics, from World War II to the Cold War and Gulf Wars. Centred amid several volatile regions, there are real and pertinent reasons driving foreign-policy to be highly securitized, centralized and based on great power balancing. According to Eurasianist and geopolitical scholars of TFP, Turkey's foreign and security policies have been defined by such geographical determinism.<sup>73</sup> Enduring psychological issues relating to the Treaty of Sevres, known as "Sevres syndrome", and subsequent perceived threats to Turkish unity and territorial integrity led to the instillation of an anti-imperial and self-preservationist doctrine in TFP.<sup>74</sup> This drove a foreign-policy orientation seeking to establish Turkey as a strategic asset to the West, and a policy of non-interference in the Middle East. Perception of threats in the region as well as the historical legacy of the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire drove the continued dominance of the military in foreign-policy, leading to a foreign-policy frequently described as isolationist and defined by non-activism. This section will outline the main discourses, actors and alliances in TFP from 1923 to the end of the Cold War, to illustrate the steady dismantling of Turkey's foreign-policy consensus which culminated under the AKP, and critiquing the idea that consensus was established to begin with.

The central tenants of Atatürk's doctrine of nationalism, secularism and *estatism* remain prevalent in Turkish political and societal discourse, yet have evolved from the most cohesive era in the 1920s and 1930s to become, primarily, a security-centric worldview which endured until the end of the Cold War. However, Turkey's entrance into several international organizations and treaties: the League of Nations, the defensive Mediterranean Pact (Turkey, Greece and Yugoslavia) of 1936, the Saadabad Pact of 1937, and the Litvinov Protocol for disarmament are just a few examples showing Atatürk's foreign-policy to be strategic and defensive rather than isolationist, attempting to ensure a security ring surrounding Turkey through various regional pacts.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, in the inter-war period under Atatürk, Turkey pursued rapprochement with the West, and for a time, managed to multilaterally strengthen

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<sup>73</sup> See M.Aydin, and S.A.Acikmese. "Europeanization through EU conditionality: understanding the new era in Turkish foreign-policy." *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans Online* 9, no. 3 (2007): 263-274.; P.Bilgen, and A.Bilgiç. "Turkey's" new" foreign-policy toward Eurasia." *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 52, no. 2 (2011): 173-195, p.175; and Akçalı and Perinçek, op cit.

<sup>74</sup> B.Aras, Turkey's Rise in Great Middle East: Peace-Building in the Periphery, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (March 2009) p. 30.

<sup>75</sup> S. Bilge et al, *Olaylarla' Türk Dış Politikası (1919-1965)*, (Events in Turkish Foreign-policy), Ankara, 1969, pp.72-73.

relations with the Soviet Union (between 1925 and 1936), representative of an early attempt at ensuing a balance between East and West.

Under Atatürk, Turkey pursued its first modern attempt at positioning itself as a bridge between Asia and Europe through the 1937 Saadabad Pact with Iran, Afghanistan and Iraq, a geopolitical stance that endures today.<sup>76</sup> Although this pact would never develop beyond its signature, the intention, in calling for non-aggression, consultation and coordination between signatory states, is indicative of the kind of security-dominated neutrality Turkey would pursue with the Middle East in the coming decades.<sup>77</sup> Further, Atatürk's efforts at implementing the famous 'peace at home, peace in the world' dictum, contrary to the current government's histrionics of the Republic's enforced isolation from its Eastern neighbours, illustrate attempts at fostering regional relations and undermines the conceptualization of TFP as isolationist, and in actuality, shows the historic source of the 'zero problems' paradigm under the AKP. Republican attempts at non-interference and aversion to great-power entanglements were departed from fully in the years following World War II: remaining only in name, not in nature.<sup>78</sup> Soviet threat under Stalin prompted a security alignment with the US and saw the country joining NATO in 1952 under Adnan Menderes. Turkey also signed the Baghdad Pact in 1954 under Menderes, which as with NATO, was aimed at countering Soviet aggression. This Pact later evolved into CENTO (Central Treaty Organization), joined by Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey and the UK, which was again aimed at countering the Soviet threat. This in no way replaced Turkey's US security relationship however, and just one year later, in 1959, Turkey entered a complimentary bilateral pact with the US in the face of the Suez War.<sup>79</sup>

As can be seen in brief here, the conceptualization of the pre-AKP period as isolationist and pursuing a policy of non-interference with the Middle East remains open to interpretation. Although contemporary relations have certainly changed, there are strong elements of continuity in Turkey's security-based approach of power balancing and entering international pacts in an attempt to resolve regional crises. Thus, the stark difference is not the policies but the actors. Prior to the 2000s, foreign-policy-making was highly centralized, dominated by the National Security Council (NSC).<sup>80</sup> The political supremacy of the military, with their mandate

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<sup>76</sup> A.Gol, "A Short Summary of Turkish Foreign-policy: 1923-1939." *Ankara Univeristy SBF Dergisi* 48, no. 01 (1993)., p.68.

<sup>77</sup> V.D.Volkan and N.Itzkowitz, *The Immortal Atatürk: A Psycobiography*, The University of Chicago, 1984., p.325.

<sup>78</sup> Türkkaya Ataöv, 'Atatürk'ün Dış Politikası' (Atatürk's Foreign-policy), *Yön*, Turkish journal, No. 47, 1962., p.27.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p.237.

<sup>80</sup> G.Özcan. "The Military and the making of Foreign-policy in Turkey." *Turkey in World Politics: An Emerging Multiregional Power* (2001): 13-30.

far exceeding simply foreign security provision reflected in this body.<sup>81</sup> The dual threats of Kurdish separatism and radical Islam, as well as reining regional insecurity based on Cold War bipolarity were the driving forces behind Turkey's approach to the Middle East prior to desecuritization, and defined by the Chief of Staff. Enshrined in the 1982 constitution, drafted following the 1980 military coup, the NSC's view on national security concerns voiced through the National Security Policy Document, the "Red Book", were institutionalized as a constitutional limitation on successive civilian governments in their relations with the region.<sup>82</sup>

Although the NSC ostensibly gave equal power to the civilian government, consisting of the Prime Minister, the President and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Defence and Interior, with successive chaotic coalition governments, the military continued to dominate due to their largely united agenda. But while the individual parties were not able to challenge the military's institutionalized role in foreign-policy-making, the rise of three charismatic leaders in the post-Cold War era saw some deviation from the traditional confrontational tools of the Cold War era, and a 'new' activism in the Middle East. Although the military actually consolidated its power during this era, which is clearly visible in the case of Turkey's policies towards Kurdish separatism both at home and abroad, domestic crackdowns on freedom of the press and on political parties, as well as militarized relations with Greece and Syria, civilianized policy-making also expanded, particularly in terms of economic relations and diplomatic initiatives. The following sub-sections will explore this transition, from military-dominated to civilianized policy-making in the aftermath of the Cold War, as the period identified as most transformative and with enduring consequences for TFP. It will critique the novelty of TFP under the AKP by demonstrating similar regional strategies pursued by the party's predecessors, highlighting that the alleged transformation in TFP may be much more rooted in changing regional and international dynamics following the end of the Cold War, including the rise of non-state actors, than particular to the party or its ideology.

### **1.1 The Cold War Aftermath: New Actors and Dynamics**

The post-Cold War period can be characterized by rising activism in the Middle East and the rising salience of soft-power strategies of economic interdependence, foreign investment, energy policy and regional diplomacy which reflected largely unsuccessful efforts on behalf of civilian elites to pursue a foreign-policy suited to EU interests and enlargement.<sup>83</sup> This activism and mirroring of EU foreign-policy has almost entirely been attributed to the AKP era, but was in fact in continuity, albeit expansion, with evolving TFP during the 1990s under

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<sup>81</sup> İ.Akça (2010) *Military-Economic Structure in Turkey: Present Situation, Problems and Solutions*, TESEV Democratization Program Policy Report Series, Volume 2, Istanbul: TESEV Publications, p. 6.

<sup>82</sup> Aydın and Acikmese, op cit.

<sup>83</sup> T.Oguzlu, and M.Kibaroglu. "Incompatibilities in Turkish and European security cultures diminish Turkey's prospects for EU membership." *Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 6 (2008): 945-962.

the Özal and Cem eras as well as from Erbakan's brief time in power. Yet above all, the enduring supremacy of security defined this period, undermining and overshadowing civilian attempts to resolve crises through diplomatic means, as will be shown in the following sections on Turkey's regional relations and in particular, the Kurdish conflict, which was and remains deeply interconnected with Turkey's relations with Syria and Iraq and the enduring power of the military in foreign-policy-making.

Although civilian governments were still extremely limited in their foreign-policy options due to the prevailing dominance of the military, following the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s there began a slow erosion of Turkey's securitized relations with the Middle East and the emergence of alternative discourses, actors and policies. Under Özal, and later Cem, Turkey began the shift from a reactive to an active foreign-policy, gradually side-lining the previously dominant security-centric worldview for one that encouraged new forms of regional interaction. This was most evident in the economic sphere, with the Middle East briefly becoming Turkey's primary trading partner under Özal's tenure as Prime Minister.<sup>84</sup> Like the AKP, Özal incorporated elements of 'Islamic' identity into his foreign-policy framing, and even Cem, a more moderate leader by all accounts, was not shy in emphasising shared culture and identity to facilitate economic and diplomatic relations with the Middle East. It was during these eras that TFP first took on the neo-Ottoman framing, evoking identity-based, cultural and historical narratives to legitimize attempts at establishing itself as a regional hegemon.<sup>85</sup>

Özal's rise to power expanded upon the limited geopolitical imagination of economic-isolationist Republican elites, bringing Eurasia to the fore as an area of economic opportunity.<sup>86</sup> This was however still balanced with deepening ties with the US and Europe, expressed within Özal's much invoked 'bridge' metaphor: once again attempting to position Turkey as a strategic partner between East and West and elevating its regional and global power. According to Kirişçi, Özal followed a three-pronged approach: expanding economic relations, creating multilateral ties and interdependence, not only in the political sphere but through cultural and economic ties, and raising Turkey's profile as a regional leader, joining

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<sup>84</sup> G.Fuller, *Turkey Faces East: New Orientation toward the Middle East and the Old Soviet Union* (Santa Monica: Rand, 1997).

<sup>85</sup> See H.Yavuz. "Turkish identity and foreign-policy in flux: The rise of Neo-Ottomanism." *Critique: Journal for Critical Studies of the Middle East* 7, no. 12 (1998): 19-41 for discussion from the Özal period and A.Sözen., 2010. A Paradigm Shift in Turkish Foreign-policy: Transition and Challenges. *Turkish Studies*, 11(1), pp.103-123 for contemporary examples. S.Cagaptay contests this understanding however, labelling the AKP as "Econo-Islamist" in his article S.Cagaptay, 2009. The AKP's Foreign-policy: The Misnomer of Neo-Ottomanism. *Turkey Analyst*, 2(8), pp.1-3.

<sup>86</sup> DEİK "Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler Kurulu, Büyükelçilerle Özel Sektör Temsilcilerini Buluşturdu" (Foreign Economic Relations Policy Embraced by Private Sector Representatives). DEİK Policy Report. July 17, 2007.



the Organization of the Islamic Conference for example.<sup>87</sup> This is arguably the exact model followed by the AKP in their regional relations and international involvement, but to a greater degree. As well as taking sides in a Middle Eastern conflict, he was quick to capitalize on structural changes and political momentum spurred by fragmentation of the balance of power after the Cold War.<sup>88</sup> Özal launched a new activism – largely focussed on multilateral organizations, trade and investment and rapprochement aimed at enhancing regional stability.<sup>89</sup> As this thesis will argue throughout, it was from this momentum, and neoliberal drive, that the AKP's foreign-policy orientation was derived.

There were also much earlier references to 'multi-dimensional' foreign-policy, a term now implicitly linked to Ahmet Davutoğlu – held to be the architect of TFP during his time as Foreign Minister for the AKP – as well as occasional interest in furthering economic cooperation based on historical and geographical praxes during the 1990s under Cem – pursuing relations with old-Ottoman lands in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. The evolution of the AKP's multi-dimensional foreign-policy is indeed consistent with this era, however flavoured by the Islamic world focus of the Erbakan government, which within the context of a conservative coalition government Refahyol, emphasized Turkey's historical and geopolitical capacity as a leader for the 'Muslim world'. From 1996-1997, Turkey actively pursued openings with Islamic countries specifically rather than the region more broadly. Although similar power aspirations were held by the Özal administration, these focussed on Central-Asia and Turkic counties, highlighting that ethnic rather than religious identity was the primary mobilizing factor. So, despite its roots in the Welfare Party, the AKP era differs from Erbakan's vision, and is far more a continuation of the Özal period. Whereas Erbakan sought to establish an international alliance based on Islamic identity, reaching out primarily to states such as Iran, Libya, Nigeria and Malaysia, Özal and the AKP, at least for a time, seemed to pursue a multidimensional policy, both with the East and West, although with a latent ethnic dimension, particularly in the Balkans.<sup>90</sup>

An important distinction to be made here in terms of change and continuity in Turkey's multi-dimensional foreign-policy is that the AKP pursued membership and leadership in a broad spectrum international and regional multilateral organizations. Whereas the Republicans almost exclusively pursued Western ones such as NATO or security based partnerships, Özal leaned towards regional, economic-focussed and Erbakan towards Islamic organizations such

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<sup>87</sup> K.Kirişçi, "Turkey's Foreign-policy in Turbulent Times," European Union Institute for Security Studies, Chaillot Paper: 92, (Paris, September 2006): 29.

<sup>88</sup> M.Aydın, "The Determinants of Turkish Foreign-policy, and Turkey's European Vocation," *The Review of International Affairs*, Vol.3, No.2 (Winter, 2003), p.323.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid

<sup>90</sup> O.Taspinar, *Turkey's Middle East Policies: Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism*. Vol. 7. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2008., p.14

as the proposed Developing-8 (a Muslim version of the G8) including Egypt, Malaysia, Indonesia, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan and Bangladesh.<sup>91</sup> The AKP looks to be a delicate fusion of the two ideologies, neo-Ottoman and pan-Islamist, pursued by Özal and Erbakan, as well as continuing the enduring Western-security alignment established under Republican leadership. The party has continued with the narratives and worldview that motivated Erbakan's leadership role in the D-8, both in its activities in the Alliance of Civilizations, as well as in the UN. Many of these initiatives have been framed as the responsibility of Turkey to assist its kin, portraying Turkey as an alternative leader and 'model' to the Muslim world, however they are equally necessary for security and to ensure Turkish interests and presence in the region as well as position itself as a regional interlocuter and reify its security partnership with the West – the cornerstone of Turkey's defence and security policy.<sup>92</sup>

Turkey formally applied to the European Economic Community in 1987 and started full membership negotiations in 1989, signing the Customs Union agreement in 1995 with the EU.<sup>93</sup> A perceptibly pragmatic drive in balancing relations with the West, in Turkey's EU membership bid, and pursuing more overtly identity based relations with the Middle East was consolidated in this period and would become a defining feature of TFP under the AKP. Although domestic and regional instability, successive military coups, domestic and regional terrorism and economic crises led to erratic foreign-policy in the post-Cold War era, as will be demonstrated regarding Iraq, Syria and Israel, some core features emerged. A significant shift in TFP objectives can be identified in this era, increasingly emphasizing economic integration and rapprochement with Turkey's neighbours, particularly with former Ottoman territories. This approach would be consolidated under the AKP as will be explored in the final section of this chapter.

## **2. Turkey and the Middle East: From Conflict to Cooperation**

Following this analysis of the changing ideational and security factors in the 1990s, which have had an enduring impact on TFP, it is necessary to overtly discuss how this impacted on relations with the case-study countries of Syria, northern Iraq and Israel – assessing moments of conflict and cooperation to determine whether any change in orientation and actors of TFP has indeed occurred. The EU, US and multi-lateral partnerships discussed above, as well as

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<sup>91</sup> M.B.Aykan. "The Turkey-US-Israel Triangle: Continuity, Change and Implications for Turkey's Post-Cold War Middle East Policy." *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 22 (1999): 1-32.

<sup>92</sup> Turkey's Security Perspectives, Historical and Conceptual Background, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, Accessed through: [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/i\\_-turkey\\_s-security-perspective\\_-historical-andconceptual-background\\_-turkey\\_s-contributions.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/i_-turkey_s-security-perspective_-historical-andconceptual-background_-turkey_s-contributions.en.mfa) (June 11, 2016)

<sup>93</sup> A.Sözen, Turkey-EU Enlargement at a crossroads: Turkey's Democratizations in Light of Its EU Candidates Status, Paper prepare for presentation at the 2004 Conference Enlargement and the Future of the European Union: Parallel Paths or Crossroads?, in Warsaw, Poland 1-3 July 2004, p. 2.

Turkey's domestic reform, which in the 1990s saw a growing economy, heightened military and economic ties with the EU and Israel, and subsequently, a modernized conventional military force, emboldened Turkey to pursue a new regional balance of power following the fall of the Soviet Union. This, combined with the interconnected decline of three of Turkey's traditional rivals in the late 1990s following the economic crisis in Russia, the reduction in Russian military spending in Syria and the destabilizing and fragmenting impact of the Gulf crises on Iraq contributed to changing security realities for Turkey, particularly in fuelling Kurdish separatism, culminated first in conflict and later, laid the groundwork for rapprochement. This section explores the state-level, regional and systemic transformations which drove TFP towards active engagement in the Middle East in the late 1990s, to establish the 'new' and continuous variables influencing TFP under the AKP.

## **2.1 Adventurism to Pragmatism with Northern Iraq**

The Gulf War brought about a tumultuous upheaval in TFP. Economic instability, Kurdish identity, insecurity and the stability of Turkey's Western-orientation all came to the fore, having an enduring impact on the shape and direction of Turkey's regional relations. This section will explore these changes in historical context, showing that the Gulf War acted as a floodgate for Turkey's involvement in the region, eroded the role of the military and led to an emphasis on economics rather than security in regional relations. Differential policy towards northern Iraq under Özal and northern Iraq under the AKP illustrates important dimensions of both change and continuity in TFP, as well as illustrating the individual, state and systemic dynamics influencing policy.

Turkey's relations with northern Iraq, first under Özal and then under the AKP, evolved at a time when the region was undergoing seismic changes: first the end of the Cold War and secondly, post 9/11 and the Iraq War. The security threats from the PKK, and the growing mobilization of Kurdish identity both within and outside Turkey's borders, which was increasingly well received by world leaders, produced two very different policies which I will go on to assess. Furthermore, and particularly importantly, both US and EU policy makers took a position towards Turkey during the late 1990s and early 2000s which emphasized civilian rather than military decision-making, with the then Chairman of the Department of Southern European Affairs David Ransom prioritizing 'diplomatic cooperation' with Turkey's region and cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs rather than the Turkish General Staff.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Quoted in A.Güney (2005) *An Anatomy of the Transformation of the US-Turkish Alliance: From "Cold War" to "War on Iraq"*, *Turkish Studies*, 6:3, 341-359., p.345

Turkish foreign-policy during the Gulf War showed a much greater scope for civilian involvement under President Turgut Özal.<sup>95</sup> However, Özal's self-described active policy towards Iraq during the Gulf crisis informed the decision-making constraints and background surrounding Turkey's subsequent (non)involvement in the 2003 Iraq War as well as highlighting the preeminent and restrictive role of the military in decision-making.<sup>96</sup> Özal's decision to join the US led coalition against Saddam Hussein in 1991 marked the new active rather than reactive era in TFP, departing from Republican policies Özal viewed as "passive and hesitant."<sup>97</sup> As Özal argued in response to criticisms of his US partnership and Iraq decision: "There is no profit without risk".<sup>98</sup> As the first test of Özal's 'active' foreign-policy, and in marked departure from the economically advantageous neutrality pursued during the Iran-Iraq War, the Gulf crisis was a disaster. In service of Western interests, Özal closed the Kirkuk-Yumurtalık oil pipelines running from Iraq into Europe, against the back-drop of intense debate from the National Security Council linked to self-preservationist neutrality.<sup>99</sup> This decision and subsequent troop deployment to the border region, alongside economic sanctions on Iraq cost the Turkish economy \$6 billion according to the Turkish government.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, and equally important, the US not only failed to remove Saddam from power, but also gave rise to the emergence of a de facto Kurdish state just over Turkey's border by declaring a no-fly zone to protect the Kurds from Saddam.<sup>101</sup> This led to a major escalation in the Kurdish conflict as the PKK made northern Iraq its enduring safe-haven and base for operations against the Turkish state.

With northern Iraq offering sanctuary to the PKK, domestic terrorism gained momentum, which confronted by growing Western support for this quasi-state, forced Turkey to consolidate its new regional alliance with Israel and amplify efforts to enshrine a US security partnership which had been vulnerable since the end of the Cold War. The economic fallout and loans taken during the Gulf War entailed the AKP's subsequent heavy engagement with the IMF, as well as pushing it to pursue EU integration more earnestly than ever before, hoping to reap the benefits of greater and eased economic engagement and bilateral investment. But it also drove Turkey to pursue regional economic opportunities due to concerns that EU accession would never come to pass. Thus, the Gulf War had a number of consequences for TFP, which while maintaining ties with the US, is far more unilateral and focused on diversified strategies of economic and political cooperation to combat the pervasive power of

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<sup>95</sup> D.Navaro, "Turkey and the Gulf War," in Haim Bresheeth and Nina Yuval-Davis (eds.), *The Gulf War and the New World Order* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1991), p.81.

<sup>96</sup> Taspinar, *op cit*, pp.17-24

<sup>97</sup> Robins, *op cit*, p. 70.

<sup>98</sup> C.Haberman, *War in the Gulf: Turkey; Turkey's Role in Air Assault Sets off Fear of Retaliation*, *The New York Times*, January 20, 1991.

<sup>99</sup> L.Freedman and E.Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990–1991*, London: Faber & Faber., p.82

<sup>100</sup> Güney, *op cit*, p.346

<sup>101</sup> Dinc, and Yetim., *op cit*. p.73.

the military over foreign-policy. This shift from confrontational tools to diplomacy can be best seen in Turkey's evolving relations with the northern Iraqi Kurds, and later, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), which additionally impelled a shift in the actors involved in foreign relations, from military to economic interest groups.<sup>102</sup> Although under Özal, Turkey first began seeking limited diplomatic relations with Iraqi Kurds, most visible when Iraqi Kurdish leaders were given the right to travel on Turkish diplomatic passports, efforts were almost entirely restricted by the enduring power of the military however, illustrating the importance of the AKP era for these developing ties.<sup>103</sup> Even then, the power of the military and secular elite remained so strong that President Jalal Talabani was only able to officially visit Ankara in 2008 under Abdullah Gul as former president Ahmet Necdet Sezer (2000-2007) and the military had previously prevented it.<sup>104</sup>

As well as exacerbating the Kurdish conflict, there were additional domestic consequences for the Gulf War and its aftermath for public opinion and opposition politics. Firstly, with successive military spats along the border throughout the 1990s and no resolution to the domestic Kurdish conflict in sight, it contributed to a sense of war fatigue and subsequently catalysed domestic pressure to reach political rather than military solutions to regional crises.<sup>105</sup> For example, the Turkish public resoundingly supported then Prime Minister Abdullah Gül's visit to the region in 2003 in search of a solution to the Iraqi question, despite Turkey not having pursued regional rapprochement as yet.<sup>106</sup> Even cooperation with Syria, with whom Turkey had barely escaped all-out conflict just a few years prior, and Iran had higher approval ratings than the US, standing at 51.1 percent.<sup>107</sup> The impact of the Gulf War for relations with both the West and the region are also illustrated in Turkey's decision not to allow the US to use Turkish military bases in 2003, which according to Toprak et al, was based on economic concerns, negative public opinion and growing debate over Turkey's US-orientation.<sup>108</sup> Nationalist fears over a rising Kurdish state, as well as historical distrust of what was largely perceived as American imperialism were rooted in the first Gulf war and a reluctance to let Turkish land or military resources be used for future material gains which

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<sup>102</sup> I.O.Lesser, "Bridge or Barrier? Turkey and the West after the Cold War," in G.E.Fuller and I.O.Lesser (eds.), *Turkey's New Geopolitics. From the Balkans to Western China* (Boulder: Westview Press, (1993), p.123.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p.8

<sup>104</sup> Taspinar, op cit, p.10

<sup>105</sup> R.Eichenberg, "Global Public Opinion on the Use of Military Force from the First Gulf War to the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq: Universal Logics and National Characteristics." presentation to the Convention of the International Studies Association, San Diego, CA, 2006., p.14.

<sup>106</sup> M.Altunışık and Ö.Tur, "From Distant Neighbours to Partners? Changing Syrian-Turkish Relations", *Security Dialogue*, Vol.37, No.2 (2006). Table 29, p.94.

<sup>107</sup> M.Toprak, *Turkish Public Opinion towards the United States in the Context of Iraq Question* (December 16, 2012). Accessed through: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2190033>. (May 10, 2015), p.83.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

might never materialize.<sup>109</sup> The impact of this seen clearly in Turkish officials stipulations for Turkish cooperation, which related to both the economic consequences – demanding the US write of \$4 billion in debt and compensate Turkey for future loses – and the danger posted to Turkish territorial integrity by an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq.<sup>110</sup>

The AKP's opposition to American intervention, with nearly 100 members of the party voting against the resolution to allow US troops to use Turkish soil, was a turning point in Turkey's Western security alliance and revealed an increasing independence in TFP. This stark contrast with the past is important for a number of reasons. It demonstrates the AKP's privileging of economic (trade, tourism and revenue loss) rather than strategic issues as well as an awareness that a close alliance with the US would jeopardize Turkey's prospective partnerships with Middle Eastern nations. The countries Turkey sought to discuss the forthcoming war with speak volumes. Gül made his first visit to Syria during this time, then Egypt and Jordan and to develop strategies to stop or reduce the damage of US military strikes, stating that "We are very concerned about the issue of Iraq. We are together in this region and we have to work together and spend every effort to solve this problem in a peaceful way."<sup>111</sup>

This is indicative of a shift in foreign-policy orientation as there were very similar sentiments emerging in European political circles, particularly in France and Germany, however the AKP chose to work together with Middle Eastern states, including Saudi Arabia and Iran. Turkey's activities during this time, memorandums, public statements and participation/ leadership in Iraq's Neighbouring Countries meetings opened the door for a more independent and civilian leadership role in the Middle East, and facilitating regional rapprochement. That the AKP did not enforce party discipline over this decision, and emphasis on Turkey's democratic credentials in the face of deteriorating ties with the US also speaks volumes, indicative of the AKP's first attempt at becoming a model for the region, a frustration with the US alliance and a political and public disapproval of US military intentions.<sup>112</sup> The United States' failure to fulfil promises made to Turkey during the Gulf crisis, the economic and domestic security issues discussed above, showed the emerging AKP elite that a unilaterally Western-facing foreign-policy could be both costly and unreliable.<sup>113</sup> Similarly, ongoing inflexibility regarding Turkey's EU bid from France and Germany fuelled Turkey's desire to push eastwards in its foreign affairs departing more than ever from the Western-orientated Republican era and heralding Davutoğlu's self-proclaimed multidimensional foreign-policy,

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<sup>109</sup> S.Larrabee and I.O.Lesser. Turkish foreign-policy in an age of uncertainty. Rand Corporation, 2003., pp.32-40.

<sup>110</sup> C.S.Brown, 2007. Turkey in the Gulf Wars of 1991 and 2003. Turkish Studies, 8(1), pp.85-119.

<sup>111</sup> Zaman, 5 January 2003, quoted in A.Balci, and M.Yesiltas. "The Case of the Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Iraq's Neighboring Countries." *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 29, no. 4 (2006).

<sup>112</sup> Brown, op cit.

<sup>113</sup> Larabee and Lesser, op cit., p.37.

which can more accurately be defined as independent. Rather than adhering to the US policy line, the AKP instead headed the ambitious but ultimately futile 'Istanbul Declaration', alongside Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Syria – with whom Turkey had only just normalized relations – to hold off the US Iraq invasion in 2003.

The 2003 Iraq decision, and subsequent issues regarding US-Kurdish ties, should not be taken out of its historical context and moreover, should be applied to better understand the changing worldview and dynamics of TFP. The ramifications for Turkish-US relations were highly damaging for a time, likely another motivation for Ankara to seek out greater cooperation with its neighbours including Russia but particularly the EU. Economic realities were also clearly a primary motivation, and this period of TFP, despite lacking in state-level initiatives, saw a proliferation of investment and trade partnerships between northern Iraq and Turkey. Conflict between Republican actors and the AKP's new policy line continued throughout the early and mid-2000s, however precluded direct dialogue with the KRG due to the continued dominance of the military.<sup>114</sup> The AKP indicated a clear policy shift in 2007 by arguing that Turkey would develop ties with Iraqi Kurds if this was beneficial to all parties and would bring peace.<sup>115</sup> With Barzani rising as a pragmatic and status quo leader, and with desecuritization ongoing, the AKP leadership pursued normalization tactics to work collaboratively on pacifying the PKK and to take advantage of economic and energy opportunities left in the wake of the Iraq invasion. The AKP engaged the KRG on a number of economic and security exchanges, which despite the insecurity and conflict stemming from both Turkey's domestic conflict with the Kurds, as well as in Syria, so far has rewarded Turkey: both in economic gains from oil trade and in security, with the KRG facilitating the Turkish military's battle against PKK insurgency.<sup>116</sup> Although this form of economic and security balancing by civilian leaders reveals some continuity with Özal's ambitions, it was certainly still a significant change in policy compared to Republican policies towards the Kurds, and economic policies towards the region, as well as a clear illustration of the military's decreased role in TFP.

That said, significant reluctance to engage with the KRG has endured based on security issues. Northern Iraq became the new base for PKK activities, replacing Syria geopolitically as will be discussed below, which caused a redirection of Turkey's security concerns and regional conflict. The KRG, like Assad before it, did little to restrain the PKK in the early 2000s.<sup>117</sup> Also with parallels to the Turkey-Syria crisis, conflict over land and resources, specifically over oil-rich Kirkuk – an ethnically diverse region which Turkey holds a disputed claim to – caused significant and enduring tensions between Turkey and the US, as well as with

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<sup>114</sup> M.Altunışık. "Worldviews and Turkish foreign-policy in the Middle East." *New Perspectives on Turkey* 40 (2009): 169-192., pp.179-180.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p.180.

<sup>116</sup> Kirişçi. 2009, op cit.

<sup>117</sup> Hale, op cit., p.146.

Baghdad.<sup>118</sup> This culminated in 2007 when, due to Turkish pressure, the US committed to a tripartite coordination mechanism (US-Turkish-Iraqi) against the PKK. William Hale described this as a 'successful use of coercive diplomacy' by Ankara, a strategy which Turkey has recently, but fruitlessly, tried to deploy in Syria.<sup>119</sup> Unlike with previous operations however, this was sanctioned by the KRG. The political process of dialogue and discussion, as well as extensive economic cooperation indicates a key shift in foreign-policy style under the AKP and is the main environmental factor facilitating the increased involvement of non-state actors in TFP. Moreover, the choice to pursue a diplomatic, or at least not fully military, solution to the domestic Kurdish conflict during the AKP's first two terms illustrates significant state-level transformation of desecuritization and the civilianization of foreign-policy decision-making.

All these examples highlight how interconnected Turkey's regional and international relations are with its own domestic Kurdish conflict. Turkey's blossoming relationship with northern Iraq stands as one of the most significant policy breakthroughs in TFP, and in contrast to rapprochement with Syria, can almost entirely be attributed to the AKP era. Despite domestic constraints, backlash from the military as well as nationalist parties and the media, the AKP implemented a pragmatic policy line in pursuing ties with energy-rich northern Iraq, marginalizing the role of the military. This opened a space for non-state actors, particularly economic interest groups and faith-based NGOs to arise as the main channels of expanding economic diplomacy and dialogue as will be explored throughout this thesis.

## **2.2 Conflict to Coordination with Syria**

Syria and Turkey have perhaps experienced the most volatile of all neighbourhood relations. From a close encounter with war in 1998 to a blossoming friendship by the mid-2000s, Syria was the flagship of, and gateway to, the AKP's regional diplomacy.<sup>120</sup> It also signified a new independence in TFP. As aforementioned, TFP in the region has been limited by the perception of Turkey as pursuing US/ Western interests. Rapprochement with Syria, including high level visits such as that by former President Sezer in 2005 during the Hariri crisis, has been pursued directly against the wishes of US policy makers, and caused growing diplomatic tension between Ankara and Washington.<sup>121</sup> This period of rapprochement reveals the interlinking foreign-policy choices previous eras, but also the changing policy environment of the AKP in the rapid deterioration of these relations following the Arab Spring. Understanding how changing security and economic dynamics is important to the main body of this thesis, in

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p.147.

<sup>120</sup> See Dinc and Yetim, op cit., and G.Dalay. "Kurdish peace process: The latest phase of desecuritisation politics." Al Jazeera 14 (2013).

<sup>121</sup> S.Larrabee, Turkey Rediscovered the Middle East. Foreign Affairs, July/August 2007 Issue.



analysing why, how and when non-state actors have played a role in foreign relations. This sub-section explores the evolution of TFP towards Syria prior to the Arab Spring, before positing some concluding remarks about how the Syrian crisis, and the domestic instability it catalysed in Turkey regarding the economy and the Kurdish issue led to the implosion of two decades of regional diplomacy.

Özal's new geographical imagination following the end of the Cold War, during which Turkey and Syria were on opposing sides, is the context behind the conflict and eventual rapprochement. Although initially this heightened tensions between the two, with Turkey's newly formed military alliance with Israel heightening the threat and consequences of an invasion, it also created the conditions for rapprochement: a weakened Syria and economic openings. As became characteristic of Özal, coercive measures were complimented by economic initiatives aimed at both pressuring and enticing Syria to resolve the crisis. One such initiative was the Peace Pipeline Initiative. As conflict fomented in the 1990s, this was designed to appease Syrian and Iraqi fears over Turkey's extensive dam construction – part of the ongoing Southeast Anatolia Project (GAP). The proposal aimed to provide the Middle East, particularly Syria and Iraq, with waters from the Seyhan and Ceyhan rivers through pipelines aimed at incentivizing Syria to reign in its support and harbouring of the PKK, and improve bilateral relations.<sup>122</sup>

Özal's time as Prime Minister saw an escalation in the Kurdish conflict both domestically and internationally. The PKK's leader, Abdullah Öcalan had sanctuary and political support in Syria and Damascus increasingly relied on this to pressure Turkey over water resources.<sup>123</sup> Kurdish identity, as with the case of Iraq during the Gulf War, was integral to this conflict: increasingly transnational and directly influencing Turkey's bilateral relations with Syria, Iraq and Iran. The rising activism of Kurdish separatists produced domestic and regional insecurity, economic turmoil and, as aforementioned, the domination of the Turkish military in foreign-policy. The military were spurred on not only by the Kurdish threat but also by the rise of political Islam, which culminated in the 1997 so-called "bloodless coup", ousting Erbakan from power.<sup>124</sup> Whilst the military were still the dominant actor at this time, it was not the only actor and there were attempts by civilian elites to pursue dialogue and economic relations with Syria, and the region more broadly, which would later entail the integration of non-state actors, primarily economic interest groups, into foreign relations.<sup>125</sup>

In response to growing instability in Iraq in the late 1990s, Ismail Cem – as Foreign Minister for ANAP (1997-2002) – convened the Neighbourhood Forum Initiative: an attempt to ease

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<sup>122</sup> Altunışık, 2009., op cit., p.181.

<sup>123</sup> Taspınar, op cit., p.10.

<sup>124</sup> Taspınar, op cit., p.12.

<sup>125</sup> Ismail Cem, *Turkey in the New Century* (Nicosia: Rüstem, 2001)., p.8.

regional tensions which, despite its failure due to Saddam's refusal to cooperate, represented a new assertiveness, independence and confidence in Turkey's regional relations. The Forum may also have been a precursor to many of the AKP's similar regional initiatives such as those during the Syrian civil war – departing from the Western policy line and attempting ambitious independent conflict resolution initiatives. Despite Cem's efforts, including meeting with his Syrian counterpart during an OIC summit in 1997, Syria's support for the PKK during the late 1990s led to a return of coercive power and nearly led to war in 1998.<sup>126</sup> Mistrust endured, as did the traditional military bureaucracy, leading to characteristically cautious and often hostile policy-making towards the region, dominated by security, as opposed to the economic cooperation proposed by Özal and later Cem. Emboldened by their military ties with the US and Israel, as well as changes in the balance of power following the Soviet Union's decline and weakened resolve in military aid to Syria, Ankara could effectively threaten Damascus, exerting a new activism and self-confidence in the region. Although the amassing of troops along the border was still within the hard-power framework of Republican TFP, such a move may well have led to war were it not coordinated with the soft-power and coercive measures used by Özal and Cem and the accompanying demilitarization however. Hafez Assad sued for peace during the 1998 crisis, and this was one of the first times Turkey was able and willing to exert coercive power so effectively.

Rapprochement with Syria first began following the 1998 standoff. The opening for this was largely on the Syrian side however, who finally gave in harbouring the PKK's infamous leader Abdullah Öcalan and cracked down on cross border activities after the signing of the Adana Agreement. This move was related to Turkey's control over the Tigris and Euphrates headwaters however, as well as their growing ties with Israel which threatened a war on two fronts for Syria. From near out war in 1998 to President Sezer attending the funeral of Hafez Assad in 2000, the change in Turkish-Syrian relations was tangible. Following his fathers' death, Bashar al-Assad came to power and from the off, showed a willingness to develop closer relations with Turkey.<sup>127</sup> This alone would likely not have been sufficient to create the conditions for rapprochement however, but merely enough to restrain military conflict. Turkey's EU candidate status of 1999 and the rise of the AKP in 2002 were key factors that paved the way for a new interaction with Syria. Democratization and EU reform relating to demilitarization and a curbing of military power, reducing the influence of the Turkish Armed Forces and the National Security Council which had wide reaching implications. The AKP's electoral success based on economic growth and subsequent regional integration policies will be explored throughout this thesis, however it should be noted here that Turkish investment,

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<sup>126</sup> Altunışık, op cit., p.185.

<sup>127</sup> Taspınar, op cit., p.24.

trade and tourism in Syria has grown exponentially since 2002 leading to a strengthened role for Turkey's business community as opposed to security elite.<sup>128</sup>

Syria's expulsion of Abdulla Öcalan in 1998 was a turning point, not only in trade and bilateral relations but for Turkey's relations with the entire region. Syria's changing position was down to all the factors discussed so far: the PKK, increased security, the EU and demilitarization. This entails state, systemic and societal factors. A final factor, the individual, was also primary however. Changing relations appear to be a direct result of leadership of Ismail Cem, Özal's Foreign Minister who continued his vision of the Middle East as an area of opportunity rather than threat. Syrian normalization catalysed a period of rapprochement with the entire Middle East and saw Turkish policy-makers beginning to speak of a "zone of peace" as the primary foreign-policy agenda: a precursor to the 'zero problems' paradigm far exceeding the neutral 'peace at home, peace in the world' dictum.<sup>129</sup> Syria was the gateway to the Middle East and under Cem's leadership, Turkey's relations with Gulf States were upgraded: Bahrain appointed its first Ambassador, Iran and Turkey improved relations, appointing Ambassadors on both sides, relations with Qatar and Oman were upgraded, and the Neighbourhood Forum Initiative created as a confidence building measure.<sup>130</sup> Turkey's mediation between Israel and Palestine began under Cem, through the establishment of a Turkish-Greek Mideast Initiative.<sup>131</sup>

Furthermore, Turkey's mediation efforts between Syria and Israel over the contested Golan Heights arguably endowed Turkey, for a short time at least, with greater legitimacy in its bid for regional leadership. This culminated in April 2008 when Syria's Bashar al-Assad announced that Israel had agreed to withdraw from the Golan Heights in return for a peace treaty with Syria, a negotiation which Turkey was quick to play an active mediating role in.<sup>132</sup> Israel's 2008 operation in Gaza put a swift end to negotiations on the Syrian side, however they resumed in March 2009, with Turkey once again at the helm.<sup>133</sup> While resolution was held back by a number of factors, largely on the Israeli side, Turkey and Syria successfully expanded their own flourishing bilateral relations. The core water conflict over the Euphrates and Tigris headwaters and Turkish control over them was settled to a degree, something Özal had committed extensive time and energy to, and the land dispute over Turkey's annexation of the Syrian city of Hatay (Alexandretta) in 1938 was put aside.<sup>134</sup> Rapprochement, economic interdependence and cooperation emerged as the buzzwords of that era, in stark contrast to

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<sup>128</sup> Kirişci, 2009, op cit.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p.17.

<sup>130</sup> Bilgen, and Bilgiç, op cit, p.185.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid

<sup>132</sup> Taspınar, op cit., p.152.

<sup>133</sup> See Altunışık and Tur, op cit.

<sup>134</sup> Hale., op cit., p.153.

decades of historical conflict, and yet as aforementioned, shows significant parallels with Özal's worldview and conflict resolution efforts. The change in policy towards Syria, from land disputes, water disputes and cross border terrorism, to the proliferation of bilateral cooperation is significant though, if not unique. The atmosphere of distrust was reportedly overcome, culminating in Syria's Bashar Al-Assad's 'historic' visit to Ankara in 2004 and the Erdoğan's 2009 visit to Aleppo which was supported by a plethora of economic interest groups and led to increases in trade, tourism and investment.<sup>135</sup> From this historical analysis, we can see that rather than beginning normalization and rapprochement, the AKP have built upon the foreign policies of previous governments, again illustrating that it is the actors rather than the orientation of TFP that is unique to the AKP era.

The onset of the crisis in Syria in 2011 also entailed a domestic crisis for Turkey. The AKP's attempts to exert soft-power and coercive diplomacy over Assad to force democratization were a failure. The economic ties Turkey had built; the diplomatic investment it had placed as its flagship of TFP, failed catastrophically. At this point, Turkey evolved from active to interventionist power, supporting political and armed groups attempting to overthrow the regime. It also catalysed a domestic crisis with the Kurds as a *de facto* Kurdish state arose up over the border. The impact of this is beyond the scope of this thesis, however worth noting is the continuity and change in the impact of the Kurdish threat on TFP. Syria and Turkey first pursued rapprochement over the Kurdish issue. Two contrasting developments altered this after 2008. Firstly, Turkey's economic reliance on Syria weakened, as did the necessity of diplomatic cooperation due to the previously discussed stabilization of northern Iraq under Barzani and Turkey's greatly improved relations with the wider Middle East. Later, as the civil war unfolded, in Ankara's view Assad encouraged the consolidation of power by PKK affiliates, the PYD, along Turkey's border. These actions once again dragged Turkey into a security and threat perception akin to the late 1990s. Changing geopolitical circumstances, while not causing the breakdown in Turkish-Syrian relations, arguably reduced the cost of losing this alliance.

Turkey's short-lived success in implementing the 'zero problems' principle in foreign-policy and demise of its soft-power image can be most clearly seen in changing relations with Syria. As has been noted throughout, many of these initiatives were proposed under previous governments, mainly Özal, but also by Cem. The subsequent failure of the AKP's redeployment of Özal's opportunist view of the region in 'zero problems' can in large part be attributed to the development of conflicts outside of Turkey's control, the Israel-Palestinian conflict, attrition between Syria and Israel and the Arab Spring. Given the parallels with Özal,

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<sup>135</sup> D.Jung, "Turkey and the Arab world: historical narratives and new political realities." *Mediterranean Politics* 10, no. 1 (2005): 1-17., p.13.

both the coercive diplomacy attempted (unsuccessfully) during the Gulf War, and the continuation of diplomatic initiatives in trade, water and oil resources as well as visa liberalization, it appears that what was 'new' in TFP was the size, scope and actors rather than the outlook. And yet some significant changes in TFP which will be discussed in the following section, such as Ankara's unusual engagement with Hamas and increasingly populist rhetoric do indicate a swing in the orientation of the AKP, specifically engaging with public opinion and non-state actors.

### **2.3 Traditionalism to Populism with Israel**

The Gulf War and the domestic crisis it entailed in Turkey also drove a renewed interest in Turkish-Israeli relations in the early 1990s. Growing mistrust of Ankara's US allies, who were exhibiting increasing empathy with the Kurdish separatist movement, as well as ongoing tensions with Syria over its support for the PKK insurgency left Turkey feeling isolated and surrounded by enemies. Military cooperation with Israel flourished during this era, in the face of a mutual threat from Syria and domestic terrorism.

Prior to 2009, Turkey's partnership largely continued down a straight, albeit occasionally rocky path. The post-Cold War systemic context of regional threat perception placed both Turkey and Israel in a strategic alliance, which was supported by the government, the military and even society due to the simultaneous process of what appeared to be viable peace talks between Israel and Palestine.<sup>136</sup> This so-called 'golden era' was inherently linked to securitization and the threat from the PKK and Syria, with decision-makers claiming that Turkey was "surrounded on all sides by trouble" and that "It is critical for [Turkey] to jump outside this circle of chaos and find friends in the region [and that] Israel was the perfect choice".<sup>137</sup> Yet key systemic changes related to the end of the Cold War, rapprochement with the Middle East, the Iraq War, desecuritization and rising populism led to a deterioration in the previously stable Turkish-Israeli alliance. Much of this occurred under the AKP and so, unlike the previous sections, this section will largely explore change under the AKP and Erdogan rather than continuity from the Özal and Cem eras.

Much of the AKP's pre-2010 political, and to a lesser degree economic, relations with Israel were established in the 1990s, and dictated by regional considerations. The first marked change came with the signing of the Oslo Accords. The PLO had long held the support of Turkey, and Ankara has long supported the Palestinian state's right to be recognized, but their decision to sign the controversial Oslo agreement in September 1993 was read as an

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<sup>136</sup> D.Jung. & W.Piccoli. (2000) The Turkish-Israeli alignment: paranoia or pragmatism?, *Security Dialogue*, 31(1), pp. 91–104

<sup>137</sup> A.Balci and T.Kardaş. (2012) "The Changing Dynamics of Turkey's Relations with Israel: An Analysis of 'Securitization'." *Insight Turkey* Vol. 14 / No. 2. p. 105

opportunity to upgrade relations with Israel.<sup>138</sup> Since this time, relations at the diplomatic level saw several high-level visits, trade proliferated and by 1998, Israel was tied with Saudi Arabia as Turkey's leading MENA market. Tourism and academic exchange also increased exponentially, as well as cultural and scientific cooperation.<sup>139</sup> Military cooperation even more so. In 1996, Israel signalled a commitment to developing relations, offering Ankara weapons it had previously been denied by the West due to its abysmal human rights record against the Kurds in the southeast.<sup>140</sup> There were multiple reasons for pursuing this relationship, some have been discussed in terms of security and the Kurdish threat, but it was also an opportunity to counter the Armenian, Kurdish and Greek lobbies in the US, which Turkey feared would dominate due to the lack of a powerful Turkish lobby.<sup>141</sup> In the face of debates over Armenian genocide recognition, Turkey opted for Israeli (and inherently, the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee – AIPAC) cooperation. From 1996 until 2010, this cooperation entailed military training, as well as mutual air space usage following the signing of a defence industrial agreement.

Notably, this deal was signed by Islamist Prime Minister Erbakan under a conservative coalition government, which logically damaged discursive attempts to re-position Turkey in the Islamic world and further entrenched the perception of Turkey as an instrument of US/Israeli interests.<sup>142</sup> Erbakan attempted to justify the disparity between his Islamist rhetoric and Israeli cooperation by arguing the 1996 military agreement was “merely a business deal.”<sup>143</sup> Yet this was not the case. This was a military and defence agreement which entailed extensive cooperation. There have also been allegations of intelligence sharing in relation to counter-terrorism.<sup>144</sup> This reveals the motivation for these ties, the primacy of security and defence over identity politics, even under a divisive leader as Erbakan due to the enduring influence of the military.

Yet the AKP expanded greatly upon what was primarily a security-alliance, attempting to establish itself as a regional mediator. Although the government continued with Israeli-Palestinian mediation policies begun under Cem,<sup>145</sup> it adopted a much more active (at least vocal) policy towards Palestine, controversially hosting Khaled Mashaal in 2006 and becoming highly critical of Israeli policy. This position vis-à-vis the Palestinian issue is in

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<sup>138</sup> Jung and Piccoli, *op cit.*, p.102.

<sup>139</sup> See R.Olson. (2001) *Turkey's Relations with Iran, Syria, Israel, and Russia, 1991–2000: The Kurdish and Islamist Questions* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers)., pp.125-165 and P. Robins. (2003) *Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign-policy since the Cold War* (London: C. Hurst)., pp 239-269

<sup>140</sup> Taspinar, *op cit.*, p.10.

<sup>141</sup> Hale, *op cit.*, pp.148-149.

<sup>142</sup> Jung, *op cit.*, p.2.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> O.Bengio. *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship: Changing Ties of Middle Eastern Outsiders*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004., p.106.

<sup>145</sup> Altunışık., 2009, *op cit.*, p.187.

continuity with, although certainly an amplification of that of previous eras, especially in terms of the ideational language used and the establishment of ties with Hamas. The AKP certainly departed from the Western track and Kemalist aversion to non-state actors and political Islam when they pursued relations with Hamas. These relations, and attempts to integrate Hamas into the peace process highlight Turkey's increasingly independent, interventionist and assertive foreign-policy. Gül and then foreign minister Ali Babacan attempted to facilitate this by convincing Mashaal to accept Israel's right to exist as well as to give up on violent resistance. Despite the failure of this plan, which William Hale attributes to US complacency and over-caution on behalf of Ankara, Turkey continued mediation efforts well into 2009, in an eventually futile attempt to establish Turkey as a key actor in the Middle East peace process.<sup>146</sup>

The important period for Turkish-Israeli relations is post 2009, an era that displays elements of both change and continuity and illustrates the balancing act the AKP has pursued. Extending influence through capitalizing on sympathies for Palestine, whilst simultaneously pursuing pragmatic economic and to a lesser degree, diplomatic relations with Israel. As aforementioned, Syrian rapprochement had become somewhat of a flagship project for Turkey. Attempts to re-integrate the country back into the international community were centred upon Turkish mediation between Syria and Israel over the contested Golan Heights. The AKP believed themselves to have won a historic victory during the last round of these talks. This over-confidence was short lived however as just days after the talks, during which Israeli officials guaranteed there would be no military operation, Israel launch its catastrophic Operation Cast Lead without informing or warning Turkish policy makers.<sup>147</sup> The populism bred from the subsequent 'One Minute' crisis led to Turkey's improved standing on the Arab Street in direct contrast with the downgrading of diplomatic relations with Israel.<sup>148</sup> This populist policy can be seen as distinct from the country's traditionally Western-aligned position on Israel which has endured since recognition in 1949. The One Minute crisis brought about a regional image of Turkey as champion of the Palestinian cause, facilitating rapprochement with the Middle East.

Although more significant than previous anti-Israeli tides in Turkish politics, there is once again an element of continuity that should be noted. Under Erbakan's leadership, Turkey had previously taken a populist stance towards Israel, with the Islamist leader running for office upon the claim that he would "eliminate all traces of this 'Jewish-based system' and reorient

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<sup>146</sup> Hale, op cit., p.151.

<sup>147</sup> For more information, see Chapter Three.

<sup>148</sup> M.Akgün and S.Gündoğar, 'The Perception of Turkey in the Middle East 2011', TESEV Foreign-policy Programme, January 2012, p. 19.

Turkey from the “Jewish-led West towards the Muslim world.”<sup>149</sup> Similarly, this was constrained to rhetoric as economic ties, the enduring dominance of the military and security necessities relating to the PKK threat impelled cooperation. Unlike the Erbakan era however, bilateral diplomacy under the AKP was almost exclusively under government control prior to the impact of non-state actor the IHH during the 2010 Mavi Marmara crisis, as will be discussed in chapter four. Following the crisis, elite actors in the AKP such as Ali Babacan, Foreign Minister at the time, stressed the strategic importance of Turkish-Israeli relations, showing that even outside of the military establishment, bilateral relations between the two hold an enduring significance which at times transcended domestic power politics and populism. Trade continued unaffected with business leaders on both sides calling for rapprochement. Furthermore, normalization efforts began once significant natural gas reserves (estimated 122 trillion cubic feet) were discovered off the coast of Greek Cyprus, which Israel was quick to take a leading role in. Later, the conflict in Syria created a renewed need for bilateral military cooperation and intelligence sharing.

Enduring ties in the spheres of security and military trade even after the Mavi Marmara crisis illustrate the legacy of the Turkish military and securitization on foreign relations, but also the pragmatism of the AKP. While post-2010 Turkish policy towards Israel is perhaps most demonstrative of changing framing of foreign relations, given the largely normalized pre-Mavi Marmara relations, the downward turn appears exogenous rather than based purely on the identity or policies of the government. Factors such as the AKP’s relations with Hamas and the One Minute crisis clearly had an impact on the general deterioration of ties, however it was the failure of Syrian-Israeli mediation, the 2008 war on Gaza and the attack on the IHH’s flotilla that led to a total breakdown in bilateral relations. Recent normalization in Turkish-Israeli relations illustrate the key trend which will be identified in the main body of research of this thesis: the cyclical transition between security-centric to economy-centric worldviews based on regional threat perception. The following section will go on to assess the underlying ideological and pragmatic motivations for changes in relation to the AKP’s broader Middle East strategy, detailing the emergence of this new status quo in TFP.

### **3. The AKP era: From a Military to a Multidimensional Foreign-policy**

Rapidly expanding economic, diplomatic and cultural relations with the Middle East under the AKP from the mid-2000s sparked widespread contestation both at home and abroad, with academic and policy analysts questioning whether Ankara had undergone an ‘axis-shift’ in

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<sup>149</sup> Özlem Tür., 2012. Turkey and Israel in the 2000s—: From Cooperation to Conflict. Israel studies, 17(3), pp.45-66., p.49.



TFP or was turning its back on the West.<sup>150</sup> While rapprochement with the Middle East was evidently amplified under the AKP, it is clear from the above exploration of change and continuity in TFP that this was rooted in changing regional and systemic dynamics following the Cold War, with many of the cornerstones of the AKP's 'new' activism in the Middle East and changing ties with the West established long before they came to power. What is remarkable in Turkey's foreign relations under the AKP is the actors and discourses involved, with far greater priority and role given to international institutions, regional alliances and domestic non-state actors. This final section will explore the AKP era specifically now – the dominant discourses of 'zero problems', the 'Turkish model' and the multidimensional foreign-policy paradigm – to determine what is unique or novel in TFP. Concluding that the novelty in TFP under the AKP stems from its actors and style.

### **3.1 Desecuritization and the EU: New Actors in TFP**

The AKP came to power with a pro-active foreign-policy derived from growing activism in the post-Cold War era, yet expanded in pursuing not only economic but human development in the region based on a rebranded image of the neighbourhood as brothers, with shared history, culture and religion to which Turkey has historic responsibility.<sup>151</sup> This was in large part enabled by the limited democratization measures pursued in the 1990s under Turkey's EU membership bid, and increased freedom of speech, which reduced the military's monopoly on defining 'national interest' and allowed for changing security perceptions, and thus foreign policies, towards the Middle East. From 2001 to 2004, Turkey adopted multiple political reform packages under the Copenhagen Criteria, set out for EU accession, leading to a civilianization of foreign-policy and, as will be argued throughout this thesis, an opening for non-state actors. The Europeanization approach is useful in explaining the domestic changes in democratization, desecuritization and changing civil-military relations, conditions facilitating change in TFP as explored throughout.

Securitization theories can help to explain the softening of Turkey's attitude towards the Middle East, both on a state and societal level under the AKP. Desecuritization is largely understood as the 'broadening of the boundaries of normal politics.'<sup>152</sup> This refers to the

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<sup>150</sup> See T.Öğuzlu. "Middle Easternization of Turkey's Foreign-policy: Does Turkey Dissociate from the West?" *Turkish Studies* 9, no. 1 (2008): 3–2; S.Cagaptay., 2009. Is Turkey leaving the West? An Islamist foreign-policy puts Ankara at odds with its former allies. *Foreign Affairs*, 26.; 'Turkey's foreign-policy shift confuses Western allies, report says', *Hurriyet Daily News*, March 19, 2009. Accessed through: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/turkeys-foreign-policy-shift-confuses-western-allies-report-says-11677624> (Accessed on May 19, 2016) ; and 'Is Turkey turning its back on the West, *The Economist*, October 21, 2010. Accessed through: <http://www.economist.com/node/17309065> (Accessed on May 19, 2016).

<sup>151</sup> 'Synopsis of the Turkish Foreign-policy', Turkish Foreign Ministry website <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/synopsis-of-the-turkish-foreign-policy.en.mfa> (Accessed on June 18, 2016)

<sup>152</sup> B.Aras and R.Polat. "From conflict to cooperation: Desecuritization of Turkey's relations with Syria and Iran." *Security Dialogue* 39, no. 5 (2008): 495-515. p.498

transition of issues from the security agenda back to the realm of public discourse according to Williams.<sup>153</sup> To understand the role of desecuritization in impacting on Turkey's domestic context and relations with neighbours, the driving forces of this process must be identified. The first and foremost was the election of the AKP as a new elite, then the EU accession process and finally, to a lesser degree, civil-society and public debate.<sup>154</sup> According to Thomas Berger, changes in norms, beliefs and values are necessary in the transformation of political-military culture. In the cases of Germany and Japan, this was spurred on by military defeat in World War II.<sup>155</sup> In the case of Turkey, the factors were: changes in national identity related to EU accession, war fatigue following the Gulf War and the Kurdish conflict, new national security policies and institutions under the AKP and debate over constitutional reform. These factors were key in enabling the desecuritized policy environment needed for regional rapprochement, particularly with northern Iraq and Syria. With the foreign-policy bureaucracy itself changed, and power diffused to various state institutions such as AFAD and TIKA, new opportunities, channels and actors were introduced in Turkey's rapprochement with the region.

The democratic reforms instigated under EU accession in the early 2000s, as well as arguably the norms and values of an economic based regional alliance to prevent conflict were also influential in Turkey's rapprochement with the Middle East. It has been argued by scholars working on EU reform and democratization that changes in the domestic sphere due to desecuritization allowed for a new flexibility in regional relations.<sup>156</sup> Specifically, reform packages impelled a new approach to the Kurdish conflict, and in so, relations with Syria, Iraq and Iran. Desecuritization, although by no means complete, was first exemplified during the Iraq War, with the military remaining largely silent on this issue.<sup>157</sup> However it's important to reiterate here that this process was inherently connected to EU candidacy, as this process slowed in the AKP's second term, and as issues of domestic terrorism re-emerged, securitized discourses have once again risen to the fore. That said, unlike the 1980s and 1990s, the military's role is now under the control of a civilian elite as are conceptualizations of security threats and national interest. The reversal of Turkey's rapprochement with Syria for example, rather than suggesting the fragility of the desecuritization process, is indicative of the importance of regional dynamics for TFP, and illustrative of the unique power the current civilian government has to define and redefine Turkey's national interest.

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<sup>153</sup> M.Williams. "Words, images, enemies: securitization and international politics." *International studies quarterly* 47, no. 4 (2003): 511-531. p.523

<sup>154</sup> See C.Dündar, 2005. 'Devletin Tehdit Top-10'u (The Top 10 List of Threats to the State), *Milliyet* (Istanbul), 27 October., and M.Altan. 'Siyaset Belgesini Kim Sızdırdı' (Who Leaked the National Security Document?), *Sabah*, 31 October, 2005.

<sup>155</sup> Berger in Katzenstein, op cit.

<sup>156</sup> Interviews with Hakan Yilmaz, Bogazici University, Istanbul, February 15, 2015; and Erhan Kilicdaroglu, personal correspondence.

<sup>157</sup> Aras and Polat, op cit, p.502.

Changes in the style and methods of Turkish diplomacy in the Middle East can also be attributed to the EU. There are two contrasting reasons for this however. Firstly, Turkey's geopolitical status as a thoroughfare to unstable conflicting states in the Middle East has (and continues to be) cited as a reason not to allow the country to join the EU. To combat this stance, the AKP pursued widespread humanitarian aid and development activities across the region, both through state and non-state channels, commencing initiatives in aid, education and infrastructure building which would become one of the defining features of TFP under the AKP. This humanitarian activism in the region formed the nation brand behind the so-called 'Turkish model', which was, for a time successfully, served up to the Middle East as a cut-and-paste framework for reform in an attempt to position Turkey as a regional hegemon furthering Western interests in the region. The second reason was more ubiquitous. As concerns grew in the mid-2000s that the EU was, and would remain, a white Christian club, Davutoğlu looked east for allies and economic opportunities to balance out the economic loss from Turkish business in the EU being continually constrained by visa requirements.

Regardless of the rocky road to Turkey's EU accession, the EU was a central anchor for TFP.<sup>158</sup> Although debate over whether Turkey was 'turning its back on the West' endured, given the continuation of ties with the US and Ankara's commitment to EU reform, this debate can be read as a reaction to the increasingly ideological and independent foreign-policy rhetoric employed by the AKP elite. Their mobilization of identity in pursuing rapprochement and establishing Turkey as a regional power based on the conceptualization of Turkey as a 'central state' (merkez ülke) and a global actor was very much rooted in material interests and ties to the EU. The AKP, as with ANAP before it, attempted to position the country as an asset to the EU, aimed at increasing the country's strategic value and material gains, establishing Turkey as an attractive role model to the region which was aimed at countering growing Iranian and Saudi influence in the region.<sup>159</sup> Yet this 'new' geopolitical understanding is not new at all, but rather the regionalization of pre-existing nationalist ideals of Turkish centrality and power from both the imperial Ottoman and Republican era.

This has played out in the emergence of the Turkish model, an export of TFP as noted above. Turkey's EU accession opening in 2004 coincided with an increased interest in the country from the Arab world. Numerous polls and public statements from leaders in Turkey's neighbourhood have clearly indicated that Turkey's value is intrinsically connected to Turkish democratization and their EU reform efforts.<sup>160</sup> Kemal Kirişçi argues that because of this,

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<sup>158</sup> Z.Öniş, *The New Wave of Foreign-policy Activism in Turkey: Drifting Away from Europeanization?*, Danish Institute for International Studies, 2009:5, p 4.

<sup>159</sup> A.Davutoğlu "The Power Turkey Does Not Use is that of Strategic Depth," *Turkish Daily News* (June 14, 2001).

<sup>160</sup> M.Akgün, et al. *Ortadoğu'da Türkiye Algısı 2010 (Perceptions of Turkey in the Middle East)*, (Istanbul: TESEV Yayınları, 2010).

Turkey is having a demonstrative spill over effect on its neighbours.<sup>161</sup> Polls during this period indicate this increased interest based on a convergence of these two factors, with 61 percent of respondents from seven Arab countries considering Turkey to be a model for the Arab world. A further 63 percent agreeing that “Turkey constituted a successful example of coexistence of democracy and Islam” and a further 77 percent felt that Turkey should play a greater role in the region.<sup>162</sup> The idea of Turkey as an important global power in the West and the Middle East sprang from EU accession and democratic consolidation in the early 2000s, which has influenced the aspirations, and arguably was formative of the AKP’s identity as an active, even interventionist, regional power. This new identity was formative of the milieu conditions needed to ease regional attention and swing focus from security to the economy and diplomacy: paving the way for new actors and channels of communication.<sup>163</sup>

Rather than an ideological transformation then, what we are seeing is the convergence and extension of previous foreign-policy perspectives. This, combined with domestic changes in the decision-making process, democratization and economic development linked with diversification of interests and actors constitutes the ‘transformation’ of Turkish foreign-policy in the AKP era. While recognizing the importance of the EU in providing a framework for democratization, this thesis argues that the EU was a facilitator and a trigger for increased civil-society activism in the foreign-policy sphere: important to understand to fill in the gaps in existing research that focuses predominantly on exogenous explanations of TFP. The domestic level is key in explaining Turkey’s growing appeal and influence in the region, and its decline since 2013, which can be provisionally marked as the end of Turkey’s EU-led reform period, as well as the end of the soft-power paradigm in TFP which impelled the integration of non-state actors as opposed to the previously dominant military means.

### **3.2 A Fine Balance: Relations with East and West**

Prior to the re-orientation thesis, which gained traction from around 2010, foreign-policy during the early AKP era was largely depicted as a pendulum, swinging between strategic partnership with the US and EU membership. The events proceeding 9/11 made it particularly pressing for the US administration to shore-up Turkish support, adding to the perception of the country as an important ‘bridge’ within the context of the increasingly resonant clash of civilizations thesis. Yet despite the US and EU reading positive signs regarding cooperation when the AKP first came to power, praising the party for its pragmatism and reform, neither have been able to intervene successfully in TFP. The US never gained its intended hold, shown

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<sup>161</sup> K.Kirisci. "Turkey's" Demonstrative Effect" and the Transformation of the Middle East." *Insight Turkey* 13, no. 2 (2011)., p.33

<sup>162</sup> Akgün 2011, op cit, pp. 21-22. These results were up by a few points in a re-run of the survey in 2010, see Akgün, 2010 op cit.

<sup>163</sup> Philip Gordon and Ömer Taşpınar, “Turkey on the Brink,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol.29, No.3 (2006), pp.57-60

most visibly during the Iraq War, and in their failure at re-building Turkish-Israeli ties following Mavi Marmara. Additionally, the EU suffers an ongoing weakening of its power over Turkey as faith was lost in the accession process even as early as 2010. Despite this, the AKP has espoused a multidimensional foreign-policy discourse, which as aforementioned, can more accurately described as an independent orientation.

Despite the often-ideological framing of Turkey's geopolitics, there are substantial economic and strategic reasons for pursuing greater Middle Eastern engagement. In particular, the AKP have mobilized geopolitical assets for economic gains in an attempt to transform Turkey into a regional energy hub for example, which has had widespread implications for relations with Russia, northern Iraq, Iran and Israel. Regardless of whether this constitutes an ill-defined neo-Ottomanism, or else Davutoğlu's revitalization and expansion of this world-view under his 'Strategic Depth' doctrine, which was adopted as the intellectual framework behind TFP, the 'new' status quo is that of Turkey as a 'central state' and a global actor based on its unique history and geography.<sup>164</sup> Once again however, the unique characteristics of TFP under the AKP should be questioned. The 'merkez ülke' pillar of TFP appears striking in its commonalities with Kemalist narratives. The centrality of the Turkish state, the patriotism and nationalism that provokes, and the continuity with Turkish national interests, are characteristic of both Kemalist Eurasianism, Erbakan's pan-Islamism and Özal's neo-Ottomanism. And so, this is not an ideological legacy of neo-Ottomanism, or of Davutoğlu, but the continuation of a state-centric world view dominant throughout much of Turkish, and indeed, world history.<sup>165</sup>

What has undergone a significant transformation then is the policy framing, the forums and the actors: with TFP taking on an active anti-imperial/ anti-Western and ideational tone, which unlike under Eurasianist policy discourses focused on China, Russia and Central Asia, under the AKP increased Turkish activism in championing Muslim democracy and the Palestinian cause. Turkey's independent global involvements, often channelled through NGOs; its humanitarian aid in Somalia after the 2011 and in war-time Iraq, mediation efforts on behalf of Hamas and Syria, are indicative of the emergence of a kind of crisis-driven opportunism within TFP. This is common of many neoliberal powers, however with the added religious dimension, has caused significant consternation on behalf of the West and Israel. It appears that Turkey is particularly active in Muslim countries experiencing a western-vacuum, attempting to capitalize on this to extend Turkey's influence and reinforce perceptions of the country as a global power: again, a staple of TFP since the 1990s. For example, the AKP elite took up the democratic mantle left in the wake of the Iraq War by a delegitimized US, vocally

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<sup>164</sup> Davutoğlu, 2001, op cit.

<sup>165</sup> For a detailed discussion of Eurasianist geopolitics and earlier attempts to depart from what was perceived as Turkey's pro-Western foreign policy based on nationalist discourses, see E.Akçalı and M.Perinçek, op cit.

advising Arab and Iranian leaders to pursue democratic reforms. Gül's famous 2003 speech at the OIC is demonstrative of both these points: that Turkey using historical and cultural similarities to boost its regional role, as well as the vacuum thesis.<sup>166</sup> Reform from a cultural (read: Islamic) perspective has been promoted by the AKP, also as a manner by which to protect against Western interference: using what the US Ambassador to Turkey James Jeffrey described as vocal 'third-worldism' in its relations with MENA.<sup>167</sup>

Turkey has used its increased popularity to leverage itself into a leadership role in the international community, exemplary of the changing modes of engagement, or 'multi-dimensional' foreign-policy pursued under the AKP. Turkey has actively pursued prestigious positions within global governance institutions, from its presiding role at the OIC, observer status at the League of Arab States to the Alliance of Civilizations, co-leadership of the UN Friends of Mediation Initiative and most recently, G20 presidency, the AKP is actively and effectively working to promote Turkey's position within the international system as a rising power. Although contributing to and illustrative of Turkey's growing independence, such participation is also reflective of consensus seeking behaviour, impacting upon Turkey's relations with neighbours and image within the international community at large. This has also had a reciprocal effect in the domestic setting as the government becomes more familiar with the inclusive framework of non-governmental decision-making and moreover, reliant on partnerships with non-state actors such as the UN in its activities abroad, particularly humanitarian ones.

Turkey's re-imagined and revamped self-image as a humanitarian power based on its participation in these institutions and increasing activism in regional aid and development had a tangible effect on relations with the Middle East. While debates over Turkey's reorientation endure in both in the public sphere and in academia, the AKPs framing of this should be taken into account. They have pursued a balancing act on this issue, as with many of the topics covered here. Internationally, the party has framed their Middle Eastern rapprochement in pragmatic terms, frequently invoking the circumstantial analogy of the EU as a framework for regional integration and conflict resolution.<sup>168</sup> Yet in public speeches and through party approved media outlets such as *Sabah*, the cultural and religious imperatives for these ties are most frequently referred to. It is difficult to determine which rationale is the primary driving force, but the two are not mutually exclusive and the AKP has shown an astute awareness of how to manipulate the electorate and simultaneously appease foreign governments' fears over

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<sup>166</sup> Here it can be said that the vacuum was for a legitimate Muslim country to promote democracy building following growing criticism of US democracy promotion policies after the Iraq War, rather than the absence of other actors. Erdoğan's support of the Egyptian revolution in 2011 for example.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid

<sup>168</sup> T.Oguzlu. (2007). Soft-power in Turkish Foreign-policy. Australian Journal of International Affairs, vol. 61, No. 1, p. 81-97.

the Islamification or neo-Ottomanization of foreign-policy. Regardless of whether driven by pragmatic political and economic considerations, or cultural and religious values (or both), the result is the same. Turkey departed from its previously security-centric approach to the region and pursued a liberal and largely independent foreign-policy led by a civilian government. This deepened both the scope ('regional' policy extended across the Muslim world) and domains of interaction, no longer high politics dominated by military or even civilian elites, but commerce, aid, and education: society-led foreign relations if not foreign-policy.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The aim of this chapter was to explore the foundations of the AKP's foreign-policy. It explored the trajectory of TFP from the Republican era onwards, although primarily focusing on the post-Cold War period as the most transformative period prior to 2002. It argued that for this thesis to interpret how the foreign-policy process has changed, it needs to first understand the historic roots of these changing dynamics. While by no means an exhaustive study due to the wealth of information to be discussed, the major dynamics in the evolution of TFP have been discussed. Section one focused on the legacy of the Republican era, critiquing the pervasive narrative of Turkey's entirely 'new' engagement with the Middle East. Section two discussed the external changes which impacted on TFP, specifically the impact of changing regional dynamics, Turkey's Western alliance as well as endogenous factors relating new civilian elites. The third section explored the current discourses and expanding actors in TFP which underpin the AKP's approach to the region, concluding that the primary 'change' in TFP was the actors, not the discourses or orientation, which became an increasingly active force in TFP following desecuritization and EU reform. This chapter has shown that many of the purported changes in TFP were in actuality, a continuation of foreign-policy initiatives launched in the late 1980s and 1990s. As such, it provides the historical context to understand what is 'new' in TFP; the rising influence and activism of non-state actors, as a foundational aspect of Turkey's soft-power image.

There were three main forces in TFP prior to the AKP. These were the military, civilian elites and Turkey's Western security orientation. While the AKP's election is often cited as a turning point or transformation, with rising discussions over an 'axis shift' and the Islamization of foreign-policy, what is evident from the above discussion of change and continuity in TFP is that much of this 'shift', and increasing salience of ideational factors, took place prior to the AKP's 'new' foreign-policy vision, particularly during the 1990s. While the most significant turning point is still rooted in the AKP era, with desecuritization and subsequent alterations to the balance in civil-military relations, the sources of this change; democratization and EU reform, were established well before. Moreover, while the AKP period has heralded new forms

of diplomacy and engagement with the Middle East, seen in the multidimensional foreign-policy paradigm, soft-power and humanitarian/ ideational discourse, even these are derived from, and can be seen as, the culmination of the AKP's challengers' and predecessors' initiatives, representing a growing trend rather than 'new' foreign-policy towards the Middle East.

The most influential state and systemic forces; economic liberalization, desecuritization, changing conceptualizations of 'national interest', democratization and EU accession all began in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Moreover, increasingly salient ideational rhetoric used to frame Turkey's engagement with the Middle East, based on historic responsibility, Islamic kinship and neo-Ottoman conceptualizations of Turkey as model for the Muslim world were also rooted in this era. The AKP launched its multidimensional foreign-policy vision upon this foundation, increasing and expanding Turkey's involvement in the region. That said, although the AKP cannot be defined as 'unique', they have furthered these processes and implemented their own policies and worldviews: an economic-orientated ideationally framed regional activism, to a much greater effect, although still with mixed results. What was found to be unique, if only in size and scope, were the diplomatic methods, strategies and actors used during the AKP's 'zero problems with neighbours' era, when economic and cultural cooperation rather than security and conflict dominated the political debate.

Under the AKP, and prior to 2013, Turkey became a democratic success story and a 'model' for regional reform. It entered various regional and international organizations, pursued rapprochement with all of Turkey's neighbours through economic interdependence, practicing a multidimensional, and multi-track foreign-policy in taking an active role in mediation and leadership in various regional conflicts. Domestic and international changes, in particular the decline of the securitized worldview in Turkey left room for, if not new, then greatly expanded foreign-policy toolkit. Turkey has increasingly engaged the region through humanitarian, cultural and economic means following changes on the domestic level. As will be argued in the following chapters, the AKP's foreign-policy activism relies on domestic actors, which given the continuation shown in this chapter, can be said to be the unique feature of TFP under the AKP. The integration and growing activism of economic interest groups, think tanks and faith-based NGOs in foreign relations will be argued to be the real transformation in TFP. The following chapters will discuss the impact of these actors, their historic roots, characteristics and identity, arguing that they are an important element underpinning Turkey's evolving diplomacy in the Middle East.



## Chapter Three

### **Business Associations: Tool or Actor in Turkey's Middle East Relations?**

This chapter analyses the changing nature of Turkey's relations with the Middle East during the 2000s from the perspective of business associations' activities and discourse. It cites the socio-political transformations Turkey went through during the 1990s in terms of economic liberalization and desecuritization as the starting point to assess rapprochement with the Middle East under the ruling AKP, and argues that business associations have played a significant role in all these processes. Although work regarding the impact of business associations in this has become a growing field under the auspices of Europeanization, this research has focussed almost exclusively on domestic politics – particularly constitutional reform and the Kurdish peace process, with which business associations and other CSOs were heavily involved – and the EU accession process.<sup>169</sup> However, as the government instigated key economic reforms and integrated with global markets, the Middle East emerged as a new priority in foreign and economic relations. This chapter will explore the increasingly trade-centric nature of bilateral relations, and how business communities have underlined state initiatives, extending their remit towards regional activism through social-corporate responsibility projects and FDI.

The working question for this chapter is how, and in what ways, have business associations/economic interest groups sought influence on foreign relations under the AKP: making the case that relations with the Middle East took on a new significance due to economic interests negotiated, exerted and disseminated by these groups. It argues that international trade has been established with an Islamic focus and flavour, and that it has been used as one of the leading instruments of TFP under the AKP to accelerate and at points, even establish bilateral relations: illustrating the changing strategies, outlook and tools of foreign-policy under the AKP and the utility and influence of CSOs in this change. Business associations were found to play the most direct role in policy-making and policy bargaining in Turkey relative to other CSOs. Similarly, Turkey's growing status on the global stage, by way of EU accession, the Alliance of Civilizations initiative, 'zero problems' and various regional peace talks were all related to its burgeoning economic performance – which has domestically and internationally been attributed in part to the economic and political voracity of Islamic business elites. These champions of neoliberalism not only increased their investments in Turkey's eastern neighbourhood, which has risen to \$65.8 billion over the last decade, but also implemented corporate social responsibility initiatives, including both humanitarian and educational work, which functions as an element of Turkey's intended image is a regional soft-power. This

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<sup>169</sup> See Aknur, *op cit*; and Tekin. and Guney, *op cit*.

supports the core argument of this thesis regarding the opening for, and increased impact of CSOs as a tool and force behind Turkey's 'new' foreign-policy.<sup>170</sup>

The first section of this chapter traces the rise and historical evolution of business interest groups in Turkey, starting under Özal. Section two investigates and to a degree, compares, the specific characteristics, aims and activities of four organizations from across the political spectrum: The Turkish Industry and Business Association (TÜSİAD), The Independent Industrialists and Businessmen Association (MÜSİAD), The Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB) and The Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists (TUSKON). This provides the contextual and empirical information needed for section three, which analyses change and continuity in Turkey's relations with key Middle Eastern countries in relation to the activities of these organizations. Section three then argues that business associations have contributed to a shift in orientation and type of power Turkey is exerting over the Middle East, from 'hard-power' and militarized/ securitized relations to 'soft-power' tools and economic diplomacy. This chapter aims at contributing to growing debates on the causes of Turkey's 'new' activism in the Middle East under the AKP by examining how the emergence of business associations has diversified interests and opened new avenues of interaction in the sphere of foreign relations. Two further issues will be discussed in this chapter; firstly, what are the mechanisms used by business associations to seek influence foreign relations, both in coordination with the government and autonomously and secondly, under what conditions are business associations able to influence the policy process.

### **1. The Evolution of Economic Interests in Foreign Relations**

Modern Turkey has undergone several turning points facilitating the emergence and growth of business interest groups and their entrance into formal and informal policy-making. This section will narrate these transformative processes in historical perspective: focusing on democratization, economic liberalization and EU reform. The first and foremost transformative process, economic liberalization, began in earnest under Turgut Özal (1983-1993), whose massive restructuring of the Turkish economy from a state-led development model to a liberal export-led one coincided with rapid regional transformations resulting from the end of the Cold War.<sup>171</sup> Turkey's ongoing integration into the global market expanded to

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<sup>170</sup> Republic of Turkey: Ministry of Economy, op cit.

<sup>171</sup> Multiple scholars of TFP attribute Turkey's growing activism in the 1990s due to changes in the neighbourhood resulting from the end of the Cold War such as Meliha Altunisik. "State, Society and Democracy in Turkey in the Era of Globalisation since 1980". 28 November 2008, lecture at LSE Contemporary Turkish Studies Conference; and Sule Kut, (2001). "The Contours of Turkish Foreign-

engage more directly in its region, both in post-Soviet countries and in the Middle East. Through the promotion of an export-based economy and subsequent increase in Turkey's foreign trade, the business community grew in size and focus. This was particularly true for small-scale businesses in Anatolia, groups which would later be known as the Anatolian Tigers. The Turkish Industrialists and Business Association (MÜSİAD) was formed during this era, in 1990, for which the Middle East was an important market. Increasingly under the newly integrated Turkish economy business associations adopted an overt interest in Turkey's foreign-policy.<sup>172</sup> Turkish businesses became active in new (and often short-lived) foreign-policy ventures under Özal, such as the 'peace pipeline', pushing for a role in the socio-economic development of Turkey's neighbourhood.

State-business relations were altered during the Özal period. The traditionally closed nature of the Turkish economy meant that the private sector was highly dependent on the state and despite economic activism from the 1950s onwards under Menderes, associations avoided direct confrontation with the state over political issues. However, since the economic and to a lesser degree, political liberalizing reforms of the Özal period, the Turkish private sector gained access to global markets and became more independent from the state, increasingly seeking input on economic policies.<sup>173</sup> Political policy-related activities became more common on a domestic level, where business associations were involved, often at the government's behest, in several policy debates from the democratization to the Kurdish peace process and constitutional reform. However, following the expansion of bilateral ties to the Middle East in the early 2000s, foreign-policy issues slowly fell under business associations' purview: particularly regarding visa-free travel to both Europe and MENA. It is important to note here that business associations, while seemingly committed to democratization of both domestic and foreign-policy, have no inherent interest in democracy in and of itself according to Öniş and Türem.<sup>174</sup> These scholars view business associations' activities in this sphere as functional and aimed at dismantling the most centralized aspects of the state which could be damaging to their economic interests. They argue that the business community plays a balancing game in its calls for democratization whilst ensuring the continuity of the current political system to ensure their favour with the regime.

Under Özal and as the EU accession negotiations intensified in the 1990s, business associations seemingly consolidated and used their position as a status quo actor to begin indirectly confronting the state on controversial domestic policy issues such as

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policy in the 1990s". Rubin, Barry and Kirisci, Kemal (eds.). *Turkey in World Politics – an Emerging Multiregional Power*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

<sup>172</sup> T.Erkoc, "Economy and Democratisation: Turgut Ozal Era in Turkey," *Journal of Business Economics and Political Science* 3, no. 6 (2014): 68.

<sup>173</sup> Öniş and Türem. 2002, op cit.

<sup>174</sup> Öniş and Türem. 2001, op cit.

desecuritization, democratization and human rights. The Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB) for example published its report on 'The Southeast Problem: Diagnoses and Observations' in 1995, which proposed expanded economic opportunities in the region and the extension of cultural and social rights, in direct contrast to the heavily militarized approach to the conflict thus far.<sup>175</sup> Although this was significant in its stance and for its impact as one of the first studies pushing for democratic rather than military engagement – a transition which would only be realised under the AKP – it was almost unique at this time due to a lack of formalized mechanisms of influence and enduring political authority of the military. Examples of direct policy agendas being disseminated to government officials became more common in the 1990s, as business associations began to benefit from the establishment of official channels of influence and interaction with the state, yet were still limited to domestic policy.<sup>176</sup> Business associations' first step into the sphere of foreign-policy came following the establishment of the Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEİK) by the state in the mid-1980s. Coordinated alongside TOBB due to TOBBs similarly quasi-public position, DEİK would be responsible for communication between the business community and the government to coordinate foreign economic policy.<sup>177</sup> Essentially, DEİKs purpose was to further the foreign economic objectives of the private sector in coordination with those of the government.

Although TFP became more economically-orientated in the early 2000s, securitization and hard-power prevailed well beyond the election of the AKP. Given the taut diplomatic relations between Turkey and its Middle Eastern neighbours when the AKP first came to power, the relatively depoliticized spheres of trade and commerce were instrumental to implementing its foreign-policy vision of regional rapprochement and leadership, thus boosting the capacity, influence and role played by business associations. Based on examining government discourses and actual practice, I argue the use of economic tools and economic non-state actors in expanding bilateral ties with certain Middle Eastern countries such as Syria was due to the legitimacy and material incentives such a focus offered to the public and to military elites, whose interaction with the Middle East was redefined in economic rather than security terms. This is due to the ideological debates surrounding the AKP as an Islamist party, and their need to publicly legitimize controversial foreign-policy moves in the Middle East. The use of economic tools to develop good political relations became a central tenant of TFP under the AKP.

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<sup>175</sup> M. Gunter. "From A to Z of the Kurds (Lanham, MD; Toronto; Plymouth, UK." (2009)., p.200.

<sup>176</sup> T. Göksu, eds, 1980-2003 Türkiye'nin Dış, Ekonomik, Sosyal ve İdari Politikaları (Turkey's Foreign, Economic, Social and Ideological Policies): Ankara: Siyasal Kitabevi, 2003, pp.25-40

<sup>177</sup> "Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler Kurulu," introductory brochure, 1988 in Altay Atli. "Businessmen as diplomats: the role of business associations in turkey's foreign economic policy." *Insight Turkey* 13, no. 1 (2011): 109-128. p.113

This legitimacy seeking behaviour and reframing of foreign relations from security-based to economic terms is visible in the statements and research publication of key actors within the AKP. Davutoğlu in particular, but also other high-level public officials such as Bülent Arınç in his capacity as Deputy Prime Minister, have repeatedly stressed the crucial function of business actors (particularly TUSKON in the case of Arınç) in establishing the ties and infrastructure needed for the development of diplomatic relations. Davutoğlu similarly stressed that Turkey's business world is one of the driving forces of foreign-policy.<sup>178</sup> Although certainly glorifying the role of CSOs, government statements, and similar ones by INGOs and intergovernmental organizations such as by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), who reported in 2010 that Turkey's significant economic growth was in part due to the dynamism of the business sector, are normative and indicative of the perception if not the reality of TFP under the AKP.<sup>179</sup> Such statements were empowering, as Turkey's presence in MENA increased, it was increasingly attributed to business actors and education initiatives. Popular support, EU funding and opportunities for civil-society increasing thus.

Trade delegations began to accompany most state visits under the AKP, highlighting the growing potential of business associations to reach and influence policy makers, not only in Turkey but abroad.<sup>180</sup> According to *Hürriyet Daily News*, since coming to power in 2007, ex-President Abdullah Gül made 70 international trips accompanied by, amongst others, TUSKON, DEİK, the Turkish Exporters Assembly (TIM) and 2,670 businessmen, who were included in problem-solving talks and confidence building measures.<sup>181</sup> These trips were varied geographically however there was a strong focus on MENA, central Asia and the Balkans.<sup>182</sup> Numerous multilateral initiatives were formed during this time, which were supported by the business community, especially TOBB and DEİK, and included actors from education and cultural fields. The East Mediterranean Four: Levant Business Forum was one such project, with signatures from Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. The project aims at increasing trade but also, creating "a sphere of welfare at the heart of the Middle East", according to Turkey's minister of foreign trade.<sup>183</sup> The signing of the agreement in 2010 was swiftly followed by TUSKON's 'Turkey-Middle East Trade Bridge-3', during which companies from participating countries met in Istanbul and trade volume was expected to

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<sup>178</sup> Interview with Ahmet Davutoğlu "İş Dünyası artık Dış Politika'nın Öncülerinden (Business World is a driving factor of Foreign-policy)" *Turkishtime*, April-May 2004 in K.Kemal, (2009) op cit., p.50.

<sup>179</sup> ECN, 'Turkey: Recovery a Chance to Reinforce Long-Term Economic Growth, says OECD', Retrieved from; <http://www.ecnmag.com/news/2010/09/turkey-recovery-chance-reinforce-long-term-economic-growth-says-oecd> (14/05/2014)

<sup>180</sup> Kırisci, (2009), op cit., p.50

<sup>181</sup> V.Munyar, "Gül, 70 Dış Seyahate Çıktı, 194 Günlük Tur 20 Milyar Dolarlık İş Tetikledi," (Gül's 70 Foreign Nations 194 day tour 20 Million Dollar Business Deal) *Hürriyet*, August 27, 2010.

<sup>182</sup> The Presidency of the Republic of Turkey. Foreign Visits. Retrieved from; <http://www.tccb.gov.tr/pages/visits/foreignvisits/> on 11/07/2014

<sup>183</sup> Öniş, 2009, op cit, p.597.

increase as a result. Initiatives such as this one have been depicted by Turkey's business associations as the first steps towards regional economic integration, mirroring and legitimizing the government's economic-orientated narrative on TFP.

Following desecuritization efforts as discussed in the historical overview, the nature and framing of Turkey's relationship with neighbouring countries, both East and West, has been markedly influenced by a mentality which posits trade above other considerations such as border security and immigration prior to the Syrian civil war. The AKP implemented visa-free travel agreements with, amongst others, Israel, Georgia, Russia, Syria and Pakistan, as well as notably liberalizing visa requirements for the entire MENA region due to the intensive efforts of business lobbies. In fact, this single issue appears to be one of the main success stories of business association's (particularly MÜSİAD and the Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists - TUSKON) attempts to influence foreign relations. This facilitated bilateral business investments and has arguably had a peace-building impact on relations with certain countries, an issue which will be explored in section three of this chapter. Such activities stand in stark contrast with the failure of business associations to secure visa-free travel in Europe, which places severe restrictions on Turkey's economic activities in the West. Consequently, business associations turned eastward to explore new markets. This reorientation or at least diversification of foreign trade coincided with Turkish Airlines extensive efforts to open new routes to emerging markets in MENA, which has further facilitated bilateral business relations. The efforts of private industry in this regard are heavily linked to the government's vision and directives however, with a journalist source close to government officials claiming that the expansion of Turkish Airline's routes to MENA was the result of informal discussions and directives from Prime Minister Erdoğan.<sup>184</sup> From this, we can see that the AKP utilizes business and civil-society as soft-power tools in its attempts to foster regional stability and ensure Turkey's regional influence through closer economic integration. Bilateral trade with Syria for example increased dramatically in volume from \$773 million in 2002 to \$1.8 billion in 2009,<sup>185</sup> a direct result of visa-free travel initiated by Turkish business organizations.

Another important factor increasing trade and economic interdependence between Turkey and the Middle East was tourism, a rapidly growing industry in which private-associations are heavily invested. Since 2003, tourism from Turkey's central Asian and Middle Eastern neighbours has increased dramatically. Gulf tourism has especially has contributed to growing tourism revenue, as Turkey became the favourite destination for Middle Eastern tourists

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<sup>184</sup> Interview with a veteran TRT journalist, name withheld, Ankara, March 29, 2015.

<sup>185</sup> Undersecretariat for Foreign Trade, 2009 Annual Foreign Trade Report and Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) in Babacan, Mehmet. "Whither an axis shift: A perspective from Turkey's foreign trade." *Insight Turkey* 13, no. 1 (2011): 129. p.146

following instability in Egypt with the Arab Spring.<sup>186</sup> Similarly, Turkish tourism has increased significantly in the region, particularly in Syria before the crisis. The needs of these tourists regarding visas quickly enter the political sphere. Although led as a top-down political process, reconciliation with Syria for example was reinforced by the increase in tourism and immigration from the country, which has grown by 241 percent since 2003 in the tourism sector alone.<sup>187</sup> This can be attributed in part to increased societal ties, communication and human interaction which according to theories on track II diplomacy, are necessary aspects of conflict resolution and trust building led by CSOs and citizen engagement.<sup>188</sup> Open borders and resulting increases in economic interdependence, particularly with Turkey's eastern cities such as Gaziantep, means that both the state and the business community had a vested interest in cultivating peace and stability in Syria. Similarly, Turkish-Greek rapprochement led to a boom in Greek tourism showing the constitutive nature of tourism and stable diplomatic relations. This strategy was originally devised by Özal, who foresaw that the lifting of visa requirements would not only increase tourism, but also trade and consequently, reconciliation: a view of international politics which has endured under the AKP.<sup>189</sup>

Exports towards MENA have increased exponentially under the AKP, beginning with a 12.39 percent share in 2002 and peaking at 32.14 percent in 2012, before the Arab Spring took its toll. Trade with Europe on the other hand has decreased in the same period, albeit minimally: falling from a 65.47 percent share in 2002 – which notably includes Central Asia – to 52.38 percent in 2012.<sup>190</sup> Why MENA has emerged as Turkey's main target for trade and investment is an important question for this thesis. Firstly, as per the previous discussion of political will dominating other factors, Davutoğlu's 'zero problems with neighbours' and Turkey's rise as a powerful leader stabilizing the region hinges upon an economic strategy. The vision of economic interdependence and conflict resolution was consistently raised prior to the Arab Spring, with policy leaders such as Davutoğlu stating that 'order in the Middle East cannot be achieved in an atmosphere of isolated economies.'<sup>191</sup> In Davutoğlu's book *Strategic Depth*, he alludes to a global trend in countries which move from import substitution to an export-orientated model in which economic interests become the centre of diplomatic activities.<sup>192</sup> By the AKP's own logic then, organizations involved in the Turkey's blossoming economy are

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<sup>186</sup> The Report: Turkey 2012. Oxford Business Group, 2012. Accessed through: <https://www.oxfordbusinessgroup.com/turkey-2012> (01/12/2014)

<sup>187</sup> Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK), Accessed through: <http://www.tuik.gov.tr> (02/12/2014)

<sup>188</sup> Diamond., and McDonald, op cit.

<sup>189</sup> K.Kemal. "A Friendlier Schengen Visa System as a Tool of" Soft-power": The Experience of Turkey." *European Journal of Migration and Law* 7, no. 4 (2005): 343. p.352

<sup>190</sup> World Integrated Trade Solutions, Turkey Exports By Country and Region 2012. Accessed through: <http://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/TUR/Year/2012/TradeFlow/Export> (17/03/2014)

<sup>191</sup> A.Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Foreign-policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007," *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (2008), p. 85.

<sup>192</sup> Davutoğlu, 2011, op cit., p.25

implicitly involved in shaping the foreign relations of the state. He also referred to the role of economics in regional conflict resolution, further noting that the ‘activities of civil-society, business organizations and numerous other organizations’ are integral to Turkey’s new foreign-policy outlook.<sup>193</sup> He has made similar claims that the business community has become one of the driving forces of TFP.<sup>194</sup>

While I argue that this overstates the role of business associations, it is reflective of the economic focus and the government’s attempts to integrate the economic considerations and actors, albeit largely those with whom they have strong ties based on shared values such as MÜSİAD, as well as represent the theorized link between interdependency and peace through trade. Necessary components of integration and economic interdependence are increased business and individual interactions. The aforementioned factors such as increased trade, international partnerships between SMEs, visa liberalization and tourism have been crucial in facilitating the government’s foreign-policy vision and goals. This was echoed by Foreign Trade Minister Zafer Çağlayan, who declared: ‘zero problems, limitless trade.’ To that end, both the government and the business community have used state visits as an opportunity to increase foreign trade, investing heavily in the Middle East as seen in the table below,<sup>195</sup> and initiating projects to facilitate tourism and bilateral investment such as the \$70 million put up to revive the railway line from Turkey to Syria and Iraq.

**Table 2.** Turkey’s Trade Volume with Selected Middle East Countries (Million Dollars)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Egypt	516	513	444	535	728	954	1.101	1.582	2.369	3.259	3.187
Iran	1.051	1.200	1.254	2.394	2.775	4.382	6.693	8.056	10.229	5.430	10.687
Iraq	–	–	–	941	2.288	3.208	2.965	3.490	5.238	6.078	7.398
Israel	1.155	1.334	1.405	1.542	2.029	2.271	2.311	2.739	3.383	2.598	3.443
Lebanon	151	209	229	219	381	340	367	509	843	794	848
Syria	729	744	773	824	752	823	795	1.174	1.751	1.753	2.511

*Source:* Directorate of Foreign Trade.

Essentially, business and trade growth made Turkey much more attractive and enabled it to be more active and diverse in its regional relations. Thus, rather than considering Turkey’s activities in MENA as motivated by an ideological transition under the AKP based on Islamic kinship – although this is certainly one element of TFP as will be shown in the discussion of

<sup>193</sup> Ibid, p.83

<sup>194</sup> A.Han, interview with Ahmet Davutoglu, “İs Dnyasi Artık Dıs, Politikanın Onculerinden,” (The Political Pioneers of Today’s Business World), *Turkishtime*, April–May 2004.

<sup>195</sup> Table found in Ö.Tur. “Economic relations with the middle east under the AKP—trade, business community and reintegration with neighboring zones.” *Turkish Studies* 12, no. 4 (2011): 589-602., p.595



MÜSIAD's privileged position – a more encompassing explanation centres on trade and expanding business interests in emerging foreign markets. As aforementioned, it can also be seen as the result of frustration within Turkey's business community in their ability to gain unhindered access to European markets. The EU's total share in Turkish exports has been steadily, albeit slowly, declining since 2002, whereas exports to Asia, including the Middle East, have risen significantly in the same period. Furthermore, Turkey's imports from the EU decreased by 10, from 50 to 40 percent between 2002 and 2009, whereas imports from MENA have grown from 19 percent to 27 percent in 2009.<sup>196</sup> The reorientation of TFP can be best seen through these shifting trade patterns under the AKP and alternate alliances between regional business associations. It will be shown however that despite the importance of these economic relations and post-hoc role in entrenching and stabilizing diplomatic ones, political will remains the mobilizing factor and thus, economic cooperation at all levels is vulnerable to political turmoil, as seen in the post 2013 climate as lower level interdependence through cooperation councils and joint projects is not sufficient to continue diplomatic relations should political will be lacking on both sides, as has been the case with Syria since 2012.

## **2. The AKP and the Business Community: Interest and Identity in TFP**

Business associations are by no means inherently politicized. Due to their responsibilities in protecting the economic interests of members, they are often cautious by nature and avoid direct confrontation with the government. That said, the functioning of business-state relations requires associations to take a political position – particularly on issues such as EU accession – and equally requires they contribute to the construction of an environment in which governments are receptive to collectively organized business interests. This section will assess these dynamics by examining the characteristics, goals and activities of four key business associations, as well as their relations and relative power position vis-à-vis the state. The associations under discussion are TÜSİAD, MÜSIAD, TOBB and TUSKON, however partner organizations of the above will also be discussed, including more traditional CSOs such as the Turkish Economic and Political Research Foundation (TEPAV) and DEİK.

These strong business interest groups seek to influence the government on different policy issues based on their identity and agenda, and consequently need to be assessed comparatively. This section assesses how secular and Islamic business associations influence the AKP on economic and political issues, within the context of changing business-state relations discussed in the previous chapter. Business interest groups were found to be able to access the AKP's social, economic and political policymaking through their presence in advisory council and

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<sup>196</sup> Undersecretariat for Foreign Trade, 2009 Annual Foreign Trade Report and Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) in Babacan., op cit., pp.137-138

boards – particularly bilateral business council run in collaboration with their foreign counterparts, as well as through international business events, conferences, multilateral international state visits and talks which have high level participation from public officials, both from Turkey and abroad. Informal and less direct channels of influence were also identified, with business associations mobilizing their financial and organizational capacity through media ventures, international education and academia with the aim of influencing policy. The enhanced policy influence of economic interest groups was found to be directly linked to shared moral, religious and sociocultural values; yet the enduring pragmatism and aligned economic goals of both religious and secular business associations means that there was little conflict between these groups in their lobbying activities, with both seeking expanded economic opportunities to the East and West.

By 2009, around 60 percent of Turkey's exports came from SMEs, with the country's becoming the world's 16<sup>th</sup> largest economy. This growing economic voracity explains in part the government's steps towards political integration of the business community institutionally and discursively. It is important to note here that Davutoğlu uses the words 'in conformity with' on multiple occasions when referring to the role of business actors, indicative of what will emerge as a continual point in this thesis, and in line with the neo-Gramscian theories outlined in the theoretical framework; that CSOs are able to influence policy almost exclusively only when their interests and practices are aligned with the governments' and thus are absorbed into the AKP's political project and hegemonic economic and political structures. That said, the ongoing process of policy bargaining is revealing of Turkey's democratization story, as well as of the changing elites and transfer of power in the policy environment. This section will argue that despite the continued dominance of the state, it no longer exists as the only gateway to power. Business associations have been particularly important in this shift due to their economic sway, and commitment to civil-society as they have founded and funded a number of social, cultural and political institutions in Turkish civil-society. It premises this argument by exploring the growing channels of influence for the business community under the AKP, the transfer of power from secular to conservative elites, assessing how this impacted on TFP.

## **2.1 The Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association (TÜSIAD)**

This sub-section will explore the characteristics, strategies and aims of one of Turkey's oldest business associations. Founded in 1971 and composed of the most powerful industrialists and businessmen, TÜSIAD is one of Turkey's foremost civil-society organizations, with a long history of effective and vocal policy formulation. TÜSIAD has attracted an abundance of scholarly inquiry over the years due to their active role in lobbying and reform under the EU accession process. TÜSIAD has been extremely active on a domestic level, broaching

controversial issues such as human rights, the Kurdish conflict and desecuritization, becoming a key actor pushing for democratic reform from the late 1990s onwards. They additionally fund a number of think tanks and NGOs through which they lobby on these issues. As a secular Western-orientated institution, research on their domestic and EU-related activities has been crucial in elevating and exploring the possible impact of civil-society, as well as changing state-business relations under the AKP.<sup>197</sup> However, due to their primarily Western outlook, there has been extremely limited inquiry to their increasing interest in the Middle East. As such, this study will fill this gap in the research, as TÜSIAD expanded their political frontiers in the early 2000s to compete with newly empowered conservative economic elites – largely MÜSIAD but also TUSKON – and have made some attempts to expand their Western orientation towards multilateral regional engagement.

### **2.11 Characteristics and aims**

Western-orientated TÜSIAD's foremost foreign-policy agenda is that of economic integration with Europe, and has been a staunch advocate of EU-led and IMF-led economic and political reforms. To this end, TÜSIAD has conducted extensive research on how democratic standards, human rights and legal/ juridical standards can be pulled into line with the Copenhagen Criteria. Within their political activities, TÜSIAD has lobbied for improving democratic standards in Turkey, transparency, desecuritization and accountability – all of which notably serve the organizations' economic interests. They profess an ideology predominantly based on Western liberalism and as such, believe in the mutually constitutive nature of political and economic liberalization. With branch headquarters in Brussels, TÜSIAD has been heavily involved in lobbying the AKP and Brussels to speed up the accession process, utilizing academic research publications, as well as collaborative platforms, conferences, public statements and reports to do so. Their success in overcoming military resistance to accession shows the organizational capacity of TÜSIAD and their ability to utilize channels of dialogue with the state, non-state actors and transnational bodies. The policy bargaining this entailed at a domestic level increased the importance and influence of business interest groups in policymaking, and thus, TÜSIAD was important in catalysing greater civil-society involvement in foreign relations.

### **2.12 Activities in foreign relations**

Unlike TUSKON, MÜSIAD, and TOBB, TÜSIAD has retained their Western outlook under AKP governance. They have a much stronger legacy of policy engagement with the EU, and

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<sup>197</sup> See R.Bayer and Z.Önis (2010). Turkish Big Business in the Age of Democratic Consolidation: The Nature and Limits of its Influence. *South European society & politics*, 15(2), 181-201; and A.Buğra (1994) *State and business in modern Turkey: a comparative study*, New York: SUNY Press., and Öniş and Türem, op cit.

face steep competition as well as arguable ideological restrictions in developing ties with the Middle East. Their primary foreign-policy focus has been Cyprus, due to the divided country's status as a road-block to Turkey's EU accession. TÜSIAD's involvement in the negotiation of and promotion of the Annan Plan, working towards a resolution for the Cyprus problem to facilitate Turkey's EU accession is one of the most prominent examples of the successful influence of a business association over foreign-policy.<sup>198</sup> However, as aforementioned, policy bargaining related to the EU has been well examined within academic literature. Thus, in this section I will explore how TÜSIAD, empowered by their relative success (at least under the first two terms of the AKP) in promoting the EU accession process, increased the scope and intensity of their lobbying efforts to include the MENA as well as the West.

Most notably in terms of MENA activities, TÜSIAD was involved in lobbying for and drafting the legal framework that facilitated the signing of the 2004 free trade agreement with Syria.<sup>199</sup> Although MÜSIAD played a comparatively stronger role in the actual lobbying, there have been demands made on the Syrian side for 'TÜSIAD-style business', highlighting that even with TÜSIAD's declining influence on the domestic level due to eroding ties with the government, they hold normative value due to their capacity and strong ties with EU countries.<sup>200</sup> Turkish-Syrian rapprochement was facilitated, if not led, by business actors. In adherence to neo-functional theories, the emergence of multiple channels of communication, in particular business elites, improved bilateral diplomatic relations. The focus on economic factors, as opposed to the traditionally militarized and securitized discourse – a transition lobbied for and reflected in TÜSIAD's public statements and policy recommendations since the 1990s – arguably facilitated a change in Turkey's relations with the Middle East most notable of which was the aforementioned signing of visa-free travel and free trade agreements, as well as memoranda of understanding and numerous cooperation protocols which were heavily lobbied for by business associations such as TÜSIAD and MÜSIAD.

TÜSIAD's main contribution regarding Turkey's Middle Eastern foreign-policy is to evaluate and make policy recommendations based on how this affects the EU accession process. Formulated by trade and foreign-policy experts, TÜSIADs reports survey Turkey's foreign and economic policy in the region. In doing so, TÜSIAD has determined that strained diplomatic relations with the Middle East are detrimental to Turkey's own socio-economic

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<sup>198</sup> Mensur Akgün, ex-president of TESEV claimed TÜSIAD played a significant role in rapprochement, lobbying for the Annan plan, using media and its informal and formal connections with government officials to push this agenda. Interview with Mensur Akgün, GPoT, Istanbul, May 10, 2014.

<sup>199</sup> Ayman, Kılıçdağı. *Avrupa Birliği'ne Katılım Sürecinde Türkiye'nin Komşu ve Çevre Ülkeler Politikası: Stratejik Yaklaşımlar* (Turkey's Neighboring and Territorial Policy in the European Union Accession Process: Strategic Approaches) TÜSIAD. Istanbul, May 2007. p.157

<sup>200</sup> Tur, 2011, op cit.

development, and consequently to fulfilling the Copenhagen Criteria. The report, in line with 'zero-problems', recommends rather than simply pursuing economic relations with the Middle East, Turkey should use its diplomatic power to act as a mediator in regional disputes, utilizing increasing EU presence in the region as one of many diplomatic tools.<sup>201</sup> This report focuses on providing proposals for mechanisms of cooperation, particularly in areas with pre-existing trade relations such as Syria and Iraq, to bring about greater cooperation and resolve political problems. It also underlined the contribution CSOs can make in this process of multilateral problem solving. The primary chapter of the report makes a clear link between the development of strong trade ties and the potential for peace in the region, highlighting business associations' increasing interest in economic and technocratic diplomacy.<sup>202</sup>

As well as lobbying, TÜSIAD uses public declarations, statements and research reports to influence the AKP's foreign and economic policy. Furthermore, it has its own publication; *Görüş* magazine, which addresses a range of issues, including post-Arab Spring foreign-policy in their publication 'Politics in the Middle East: Changing Climate'. Arguably TÜSIAD has only started to form a strong position on Turkey's Middle East policy since the onset of the Arab Spring. They have firmly critiqued the AKP's Syria policy and called for Turkey to act "as an agent in solution processes, and not in a confrontation, in line with its deep-seated pacifist tradition."<sup>203</sup> In particular, they have called for the AKP to refrain from entering a military conflict. TÜSIAD was not alone in their call. The business community in general have also made their opinions known regarding a possible war with Syria. Osman Dolar, president of the Eastern Anatolia Industrialists and Businessmen's Federation has referred to the economic consequences of war and indicated their support for a diplomatic solution to the conflict. Furthermore, Şanlıurfa Chamber of Commerce and Industry issued a presidential statement arguing that further tension between Syria and Turkey would have massive and detrimental ramifications for the Turkish economy, particularly interest rates. While impact is impossible to determine here, the significance of business associations taking a vocally oppositional stance, igniting public debate and pressuring governmental actors is significant. This politicization of business associations under the AKP shows the increasing potential of these organizations to take an oppositional stance on previously highly securitized and closed policy-making issues such as military conflict.

Overall, TÜSIAD has shown neither a particular interest nor activism in Turkey's Middle East policy. The major contribution of TÜSIAD in the field of foreign relations, and within that, in facilitating Turkey's activism in the Middle East is related to their EU lobbying. They

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid

<sup>202</sup> Ibid

<sup>203</sup> 'Turkish investors urge foreign-policy revision' *Hurriyet Daily News*. 21 September. 2013. Retrieved from; <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-investors-urge-foreign-policy-revision.aspx?pageID=238&nid=54867>

presented a comprehensive argument as to why Turkish activism in MENA was beneficial to the EU, and argument which is also dominant within governmental circles. Additionally, on a broader scale, TÜSIAD has contributed consistently and significantly to the democratic environment in Turkey, upon which much of Turkey's global prestige was hinged upon. Through its activities promoting EU reform, to its involvement in peace negotiations with Cyprus, TÜSIAD has also contributed to normalizing and institutionalizing business association policy bargaining in the sphere of foreign affairs. As such, which any direct policy change vis-à-vis the Middle East could not be determined in the case of TÜSIAD, they remain a very important actor in terms of general changes in state-society relations, civil-society empowerment and lobbying effectivity. That said, their role has been increasingly usurped by business associations espousing shared values with the ruling elite, showing the fragility of civil-society influence under paternalistic or authoritarian regimes, as well as the importance of identity in TFP.

## **2.2 The Independent Industrialists and Businessmen Association (MÜSIAD)**

Looking at MÜSIAD as opposed to TÜSIAD is useful insofar as it highlights the importance culture, and alternative historical and meta-social visions. Recent changes in state-society relations under the AKP, diversification of actors and emergence of a new Islamic elite is encapsulated by the TÜSIAD- MÜSIAD dichotomy and the transfer of power from the western-orientated secular urban elite to the conservative Islamic bourgeoisie. The changing level of influence, with TÜSIAD dominating prior to the rule of the Islamist Welfare Party in the mid-1990s and later stagnating under the AKP, when MÜSIAD emerged as the leading interest group with strong organic ties to policy makers – using patronage networks to take over mechanisms of political influence and economic gain – shows the importance of ideational factors. It also reveals the afore point that while the growth of civil-society under the AKP was initially taken as a marker of pluralism, the government was in reality, constructing a new counter-elite to challenge the Kemalist hegemony that had long dominated Turkey's internal and foreign-policy. This sub-section explores these dynamics through examination of MÜSIADs relations with the state, as well as international actors, providing a critique of scholarship that proposes the prominence of MÜSIAD to be reflective of growing pluralism and arguing instead that it reflects a clientalist seizure of social status from secular elites through identity-based patronage ties.

### **2.21 Characteristics and aims**

In terms of the political context which has facilitated the increased importance of trade and economic actors within Turkey's foreign-policy outlook, as well as its activism in MENA, the rise of the 'Anatolian Tigers' has been crucial. Amongst the business associations examined during this research, MÜSIAD was found to have the most influence and the strongest

relationship with the government. Reigning from Turkey's heartland, Anatolia, this new elite of devout businessmen are representative of the AKP's electoral base and consequently, are better situated to influence policymaking. Birthed from economic liberalization measures in the 1980s and '90s and new export-orientated market, but also from the re-emergence of political Islam and subsequent rise of 'Islamic capital', the Anatolian Tigers have pursued an Eastern-facing strategy to increase foreign trade with Turkey's neighbours. They are business-orientated, market driven and broadly liberal regarding economic and domestic policy issues, although not in comparison to TÜSIAD and with a strong focus on social rather than democratic rights. MÜSIAD operates in 60 different countries, most of which are in Africa and Asia.

By pursuing policies which are in the interests of the 'Anatolian Tigers', the AKP have been able to deepen their support base in conservative cities such as Konya and Kayseri as job opportunities and wealth have increased.<sup>204</sup> The association was found to have strong social cohesion as well as large branches in Turkey's conservative heartland, and a substantial membership base, as well as the aforementioned extensive foreign offices. All of this is beneficial to the government and MÜSIAD has strong personal ties to ruling elites. In fact, many of the AKP's founding members are members of the organization. Simultaneously, MÜSIAD members have in many cases joined the AKP's local offices in Anatolian cities, revealing the organic links and revolving door between Islamic business and government. Tracking of these personal ties during research proved difficult however a strong correlation was found between the geographical location of MÜSIAD offices and election results favouring the AKP.<sup>205</sup> While by no means proving causation, it does provide clues regarding the dynamics of this relationship. This overlap, as well as the myriad informal ties between individuals seen within the member profiles of MÜSIAD and AKP policy makers is indicative of MÜSIAD's influence. As MÜSIAD supports the AKP in elections and through domestic political participation, the AKP's foreign-policy must continue to support the economic activities of the association. Further, MÜSIAD as well as TUSKON provide a venue for key AKP figure such as the Prime Minister to use major annual events to announce and discuss their domestic and foreign-policy agenda.

As well as these informal and formal ties, MÜSIAD and the AKP have a shared world view. C. Wright Mills argues that it is this, rather than lobbying, that has facilitated business influence over government.<sup>206</sup> MÜSIAD has promoted an overtly Islamic agenda and value system within its economic activities based on the East Asian model of economic

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<sup>204</sup> Kirisci, 2009, p.30

<sup>205</sup> MÜSIAD, Branch Chairpersons. Accessed through: <http://www.musiad.org.tr/en/chairmen-of-branches> (03/02/2014)

<sup>206</sup> S.Maxfield and B.R.Schneider (eds.), *Business and the State in Developing Countries* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 53.

development, which while accepting and encouraging integration with the West, is presented as an alternative organizational structure based on networks between small and medium sized businesses, utilizing ‘the culture of traditional values’; *Homo Islamicus* as opposed to *Homo Economicus*.<sup>207</sup> MÜSIAD’s meta-social vision of Islamic economic development fits well with Davutoğlu’s vision of ‘historic depth’; of using cultural and historical ties to further diplomatic and economic integration with the Middle East. Consequently, it is natural that the AKP should have close links with, and remain open to influence from interest groups who are beneficial to the government domestically and support the AKP’s broader foreign-policy ideology. Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (ORSAM) scholar, Mehmet Şahin, argues that it is this shared history and culture which enables MÜSIAD to be the main force behind the AKP’s developing MENA policy.<sup>208</sup> However, the Islamic values of MÜSIAD do not negate or eclipse their economic strategy. They have for example attempted to alleviate tensions in Turkish-Israeli relations, asserting that the reason Turkey has been suffering from bad relations with Israel is due to the privileging of security concerns rather than economic relations. It is argued here that the civic space and pluralism that was briefly pursued in the early 2000s due to the emergence of organizations such as MÜSIAD and TUSKON, and competition with TÜSIAD, helped transform the security-centred nature of TFP and providing an alternative narrative and agenda for relations with the Middle East.

## 2.22 Activities in foreign relations

As well as lobbying government actors through informal and formal networks, MÜSIAD has commandeered the official and influential role played by Turkey’s Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEİK). Alongside TUSKON following its establishment in 2005, MÜSIAD began to play this role, organizing state visits, bilateral cooperation councils and participating in transnational events. MÜSIAD participates and hosts meetings in Turkey for the Islamic Development Bank and the International Business Forum (an umbrella organization for Muslim countries). MÜSIAD’s regular business exertions are notable in their geography, focussing primarily on the Middle East and Africa, but also Central Asia.<sup>209</sup> These trips, as aforementioned, are often integrated into larger diplomatic missions in the region and correlate with (or are arguably causal in) increasing exports to MENA. In this regard, MÜSIAD and the AKP’s agenda is a mutually constitutive one. As such, we can determine that a combination

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<sup>207</sup> E.Yarar. (1997) *A New Perspective of the World At the Threshold of the 21st Century*, Istanbul: MÜSIAD publications in, Fuat Keyman, and Berrin Koyuncu eds. "Globalization, alternative modernities and the political economy of Turkey." *Review of International Political Economy* 12, no. 1 (2005): 105-128. p.118

<sup>208</sup> M.Şahin. *Anadolu kaplanları Türkiye’yi Ortadoğu ve Afrika’da etkili. Ortadoğu Analiz*. (Anatolian tigers influence Turkey in the Middle East and Africa. Middle East Analysis) 17 (2), 94-99 2010. p.95

<sup>209</sup> B.Koyuncu. "Globalization and Its Impact on Turkish Business Associations: TÜSIAD and MÜSIAD in a Comparative Perspective." PhD diss., Department of Political Science and Public Administration, the Institute of Economics and Social Sciences of Bilkent University, 2003.



of Islamic identity (largely MÜSİAD's) and the economic considerations of both MÜSİAD and the AKP (largely a need for new export markets), have contributed to Turkey's re-orientation. According to Şahin, the Anatolian Tigers have been involved in the signing of various business agreements in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Qatar amongst others which have subsequently created diplomatic opportunities for the government. He went further in arguing that this kind of business led contact/ initiatives are a new style of Turkish diplomacy shaped by the activities of entrepreneurs whose economic activities have enabled Turkey's political and cultural expansion into the Middle East.<sup>210</sup>

MÜSİAD has released numerous research publications on Turkey's future, both in economic and political terms, most of which deal quite generally with Turkish industry and foreign direct investment, however with a few focussing overtly on cooperation between Islamic countries and the Balkans such as their report 'Economic Cooperation Between Islamic Countries'.<sup>211</sup> This report, published in 2008 but in continuation of a similar one from 1994, handles the socio-economic and political benefits of closer cooperation between Islamic countries, not only bilaterally but multilaterally; including CSOs, international organizations such as the UN and OIC and private sector development. It should be noted that this report takes care to emphasise the importance (and historical legitimacy based on Ottoman practices) of civil-society in not only domestic development but regional development, and the need for Islamic solidarity networks of NGOs to combat the multitude of problems found in the region. This advice has seemingly translated into policy practice under the AKP, whose humanitarian aid programmes are heavily reliant on the research and capacity of Islamic NGOs. They claim coordination between civil-society and public offices in providing for public needs can create a model of effective social services closer to the Ottoman structure. This would be based on the Vakıf (Waqf) system in Islamic law. Islamic ethics are emphasised as a way to maintain social integrity within economic relations. MÜSİAD's approach towards Islam, the state and economic theory is broadly thus.

In terms of Turkey's area of social and political influence, MÜSİAD's 2008 report, and its predecessor published in 1994, certainly seems prophetic. Turkey has reinvigorated relations with the Islamic world, focussing overtly on areas of old Ottoman influence and utilized religious and cultural ties to facilitate political and economic ones. It can be seen in MÜSİAD's 2010 report; 'Rising Value; Turkey',<sup>212</sup> that such developments have been highly beneficial for Turkey's Anatolian business community. Turkey's business potential in MENA is viewed as growing and the report's author, MÜSİAD's then president Ömer Cihad Vardan, offers

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<sup>210</sup> Şahin, op cit. p.98

<sup>211</sup> MÜSİAD. 2008. İslam Ülkeleri Arasında İşbirliği (Cooperation Between Islamic Countries). MÜSİAD Report no. 16/48, İstanbul.

<sup>212</sup> MÜSİAD. 2010. Yükselen Değer: Türkiye (Emerging Value: Turkey) MÜSİAD Report No. 67, İstanbul.

policy prescriptions on how the AKP can further facilitate economic growth through political and diplomatic tools such as ‘zero problems’. It also covers the benefits of regional economic cooperation in fostering a safer and more peaceful region, highlighting both MÜSİAD’s and the government’s perception of economic integration-based conflict resolution or stabilization. Such reports furthermore highlight the increased politicization of MÜSİAD. There is clearly an ideological synergy between MÜSİAD and the AKP, demonstrated by governmental level participation in their projects, such as Davutoğlu’s contribution to MÜSİAD’s research.<sup>213</sup>

Although rhetoric from both governmental and non-governmental actors has centred far more on Islamic or cultural discourses, and in this context Islam has emerged as a much greater aspect of Turkey’s regional relations, MÜSİAD’s economic theory remains precisely that, a theory. Turkey’s foreign relations continue to be driven by material and security considerations. Consequently, although MÜSİAD’s perspective is being integrated in certain circumstances, this is only when the external environment is conducive to such influence. Turkey’s erratic relations with Syria and pragmatic economic relations with Israel are demonstrative of this. What we are seeing in Turkey presently is that while in some circumstances (such as Syria), foreign-policy decisions have facilitated greater economic ties and business relations, in other circumstances (northern Iraq) economic and commercial ties have allowed for the development or stabilization of diplomatic relations. Former advisor to Erdoğan, İbrahim Kalın, in an article for MÜSİAD, attributes this to a balance in constructive and dynamic foreign-policy formation, claiming the success of Turkey’s multidimensional foreign-policy is due to the participation of non-state actors in decision-making process during periods in which they are able to have a constructive input.<sup>214</sup> The subtext being that civil-society involvement in foreign relations is not a rule, rather it is limited to periods during which the government feel their communication strategy and methods of diplomacy could benefit from a multilateral approach. Essentially, MÜSİAD, as part of the AKP’s larger neoliberal project, is a conduit through which the state legitimizes and channels its economic policies. As such, expanding relations with MENA can be viewed as resulting from an alignment of the material interests of business associations and the government.

Growing ties between the AKP and conservative business associations have made public offices, particularly those of trade, more receptive to external influence. The AKP is aware that its electoral success is contingent upon economic progress, which in turn, hinges upon extending economic integration with Turkey’s neighbours. The ‘zero problems’ policy was arguably based upon economic relations, but proceeding from this came a need to entrench

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<sup>213</sup> MÜSİAD. 1994. 21. Yüzyılda Türkiye’nin Hedefleri (Turkey’s Targets in the new century). MÜSİAD Report no. 10/2.

<sup>214</sup> İbrahim Kalın. 2010. “Türk Dış Politikası ve Kamu Diplomasisi,” Yükselen Değer: Türkiye, (Turkish Foreign-policy and Public Diplomacy. Emerging Value: Turkey) MÜSİAD Report no. 67, pp: 49-65.

good diplomatic relations too, which has brought Turkey to the forefront of a number of regional disputes, predominantly as a mediator but sometimes as the subject. Literature on this transition towards an active role in international politics has abounded but has often missed out a crucial variable in this transition: Turkey's business community. Turkey's relations with pre-revolutionary Syria, as well as with Iran and even more controversially, Sudan, are still cited as demonstrative of Turkey turning its back on the West rather than the result of complex economic needs and domestic factors, including but not limited to the needs of economic interest groups. Similarly, despite Turkey's complex diplomatic relations with Israel, this appears to have been no impediment to growing bilateral economic relations, with business associations on both sides calling for restraint. Most of all, Turkey's conservative business community has emerged as a force behind rapprochement and democratic development in the Middle East based upon the perception that Turkey will benefit economically from a more peaceful and stable region, envisioning themselves as the vehicle of change through trade/business diplomacy.<sup>215</sup>

Although much more than this, the role and influence of civil-society groups is also a symbolic one, and one which foreign governments are well acquainted with. TÜSIAD and MÜSIAD have been locked in a not-so-silent battle of attrition since MÜSIAD's emergence. Their influence has grown quickly due in part to their extensive connections with provincial businesses and Middle Eastern business community. This has been noted by foreign governments, and notably not just Islamic countries with whom MÜSIAD is heavily engaged. The 2011 US congressional delegation's decision to visit MÜSIAD before TUSIAD, the latter with whom the US has extensive business relations, indicative of this shift.<sup>216</sup> MÜSIAD has accumulated structural power under the AKP due to their capital, ability to attract foreign investment from oil-rich Arab states and extensive transnational networks not only with Middle Eastern states, but also the US, and international institutions. While this has in some ways made them more independent from the state, when it comes to foreign-policy, their shared ideology, characteristics and aims mean that this independence is not readily discernible. Yet on a domestic level, as market-driven Islamic capitalists who aim to downsize the state and control vast swathes of local capital, MÜSIAD are seemingly playing a strategic game. Whilst direct opposition to the state is detrimental to their business interests, they have been subtly pushing for favourable economic reforms. Though economic reforms do not necessitate political ones, it seems from the research above that MÜSIAD's influence had a broadly democratizing effect on policy-making during the reform period.

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<sup>215</sup> Şahin, op cit.. p.98

<sup>216</sup> L.Boulton, U.Boyner: Lobbyist for business pulls few punches. Financial Times, December 13, 2011. Accessed through: <https://www.ft.com/content/ab4eb228-1f60-11e1-9916-00144feabdc0> (07/05/2014)

## **2.3 The Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists (TUSKON)**

Change in business-state relations is perhaps best demonstrated by the dizzying rise to power of TUSKON, as well as their subsequent possible demise following the Gülen split. Established in 2005, they rapidly emerged as an important player in society and politics. TUSKON is particularly important for this analysis insofar as they, like MÜSIAD, are a faith-based organization as well as an economic one and take an explicit moral stance in their discourse and activities, which have been primarily targeted at the developing world. As such, they have been much more active in MENA than TÜSIAD or the IKV, highlighting the ideational nature of Turkey's re-orientation as faith-based business associations both have better relations with the government and are increasingly able to assert their policy preferences in the foreign-policy sphere. Working alongside the government, TUSKON lobbied effectively for the expansion of Turkey's economic and diplomatic relations with Africa. Although this not detailed at length due to issues of scope, TUSKON's activities in Africa are important insofar as they demonstrate how this previously powerful organization gained its experience, transnational networks and plaudits from government officials. In partnership with the Foreign Ministry, TUSKON has institutionalised annual trade summits which encourage collaboration between African and Turkish business communities and public officials, particularly those hailing from the Ministry of Foreign Trade and the Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA).<sup>217</sup> TUSKON's tenuous social status and political power since the Gülen split highlights one of the enduring themes of this thesis, that despite political openings following desecuritization, Turkey remains a highly centralized state and thus CSO influence on foreign-policy is limited to select elite organizations. That said, TUSKON continues to operate abroad and was a major instrument of Turkish soft-power, which shows that impact on foreign relations more broadly is relatively outside of governmental control.

### **2.31 Characteristics and goals**

TUSKON is private, voluntary umbrella organization of SMEs. Its Gülenist status, prior to 2012, ensured close relations with state institutions as well as a shared strategy and discourses and a pro-government stance. Alongside MÜSIAD, TUSKON has subsumed some of the responsibilities of DEİK in mediating Turkey's foreign economic relations. TUSKON has been heavily involved in lobbying for and implementing Turkey's economic and diplomatic expansion into Africa and East Asia. Multiple analysts have attributed Turkey's successful involvement in Africa to the activities of Turkish business,<sup>218</sup> and TUSKON was at the forefront of these efforts, establishing and extending business-networks and building of

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<sup>217</sup> M.Ozkan. "Turkey's Opening to Africa." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 48, no. 4 (2010): 525-546.

<sup>218</sup> Interview with Ufuk Ulutas , SETA, Ankara, March 23, 2015.

cultural and educational centres across the MENA region, seeing such activities as a method by which to boost trade relations according to a statement by TUSKONs president; Ryzanur Meral during the Turkey-West Africa Trade Bridge.<sup>219</sup> Additionally, there was a strong focus on increasing Turkey's international status and influence, shown in TUSKONs discourse during an event celebrating the fourth anniversary of the organization. In his speech, TUSKON President Rızanur Meral emphasized service to the nation and economic expansion by "sending a business delegation to every country on Earth."<sup>220</sup> TUSKON is a Gülenist organization, which follows his teachings on reconciliation, cultural dialogue and non-violence. TUSKON was found to have adopted this approach in their activities abroad and moreover, furthered Gülen's (and the AKP's) goal of increasing the influence of Turkish Islam through funding cultural and educational initiatives abroad. Their support was seemingly reciprocated prior to the Gülen split, with Prime Minister Erdoğan praising their religious values and their active international involvement.

### **2.32 Activities in foreign relations**

Rather than communicating their agenda bilaterally, TUSKON organizes large scale business events such as the Middle East Trade Bridge, a forum which gathers regional businessmen in Istanbul, and the World Trade Bridge summit, an annual event which has so far focussed on Turkey's bilateral economic relations with the Middle East, Africa, Eurasia and Asia-Pacific.<sup>221</sup> TUSKONs 2010 Middle East Trade Bridge brought together over 200 businessmen from a range of trade unions and economic organizations from across Turkey and the Middle East. The stated aims of the summit were to sign and discuss the implementation of various multilateral and bilateral business deals which would facilitate the growth of trade, tourism and economic integration in the region, particularly focussing on Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. Prior to the Gülen split, TUSKON was praised by business actors and public officials for their mediating and facilitating role in regional trade. It was decided by the foreign ministers of Turkey, Syria, Jordon and Lebanon during this meeting that a High Level Cooperation Council, a multilateral agreement between the aforementioned, should be established to 'develop a long-term strategic partnership' and to 'create a zone of free movement of goods and persons among our countries'.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Countries Where Turkish Schools Located Bolster Trade, TUSKON Head Says. Cihan New Agency. April 14, 2014. Accessed through; <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-364843504.html>

<sup>220</sup> 'TUSKON Başkanı Meral'den samimi açıklama (Frank statements from TUSKON Chair Meral)' Bugün Online. April 2, 2011. Accessed through: <http://ekonomi.bugun.com.tr/bu-isinde-bir-bedeli-var--haberi/149177> (17/03/2014)

<sup>221</sup> Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists of Turkey. TUSKON. Events listings. Accessed through: <http://www.tuskonus.org/tuskon.php?c=17&s=28> (11/07/2014)

<sup>222</sup> Turkish, Arab firms meet on TUSKON bridge to expand trade. *Today's Zaman*. December 13, 2010. Accessed through; [http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail\\_openPrintPage.action?newsId=229488](http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_openPrintPage.action?newsId=229488) (12/08/2014)

These kinds of agreements, whilst certainly not unique in existence, are largely unique in style to the AKP era. Whilst previous administrations have held such summits, there were largely dominated by the military – a voracious economic power in its own right. The inclusion of conservative economic elites as opposed to military ones in these councils highlights the transferal of power under desecuritization. However, TUSKON and MÜSIADs greater influence compared with other CSOs highlights that this is not democratic by nature, but rather reflective of the AKP's construction of a government-aligned and controlled conservative counter-elite. TUSKON, alongside TOBB and MÜSIAD, was found to be one of the most influential business associations in the period of 2002 – 2011 as they were backed by the government, both in policy discourse and in practice through financial support and inclusion. The AKP have shown their support with high level participation during these events, formalizing international economic agreements during them, adding legitimacy and elevating the power of all three.<sup>223</sup>

Under the AKP, fifteen embassies have been opened in sub-Saharan Africa and Turkey has joined the African Union as an observer state. TUSKON, established in 2005, has been at the forefront of Turkey's new foreign-policy activism in Africa. It's increasingly globalized world vision is articulated by the multiple international trade summits it has organized. These initiatives involve multi-level collaboration and received widespread support from the government, who send regular delegations from the Ministry of Foreign Trade. This put TUSKON in a unique position, enabling them to communicate directly with public officials, using formal and informal mechanisms of foreign-policy participation and influence, ranging from business council meetings to accompanying state officials on foreign trips. Notably, TUSKON effectively lobbied both the UN and the AKP to hold the UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries in Istanbul in 2011, with public, civil and business actors coming from across MENA, central Asia and South America. Directly after this conference, the AKP's visits to MENA increased, with both the government and TUSKON pledging to resolve visa difficulties for the region.

Due to their policy in Africa, the AKP have not only benefitted economically but also politically as it was in part due to the support of African states that Turkey was elected a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. Thus, one of the reasons CSOs, and in this case, predominantly business associations but also Islamic NGOs are able to influence policy in this context is that their aims and outlook are aligned those of the government and in some cases, extremely beneficial, and thus they act as an accelerator on policy rather than instigator. That said, TUSKONs leading role in foreign trade and economic diplomacy has been demolished since the Gülen split, showing the vulnerability of civil-

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<sup>223</sup>Altay., op cit. p.118

society to changes in political will. The informal and formal mechanisms of influence enjoyed by the organization are now closed, and TUSKON has endured legal and political attacks from state institutions not only in Turkey, but in countries where they operate such as Somalia due to pressure from the AKP. As such, TUSKON's domestic and international success during the early years of AKP rule was clearly contingent on ideational alignment and a position of non-confrontation, challenging notions that civil-society integration is either inherently democratic or pluralistic.

#### **2.4 The Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB)**

The designation of TOBB as a civil-society actor is somewhat spurious. If we apply one of the core foundations of the definition of civil-society; namely, that it is a voluntary organisation, then that would seemingly exclude TOBB from this category. However, although membership of TOBB by businesses is not voluntary, further activities, particularly those relating to foreign-policy are, thus meaning TOBB maybe included within this analysis as an actor operating at both the civil and the state level. That said, TOBB's leadership benefits from direct links to government, with the chairman often entering high-level political positions. Necmettin Erbakan and Ali Coşkun amongst others were both TOBB presidents. These organic links have arguable prevented TOBB from taking a confrontational approach in their politics, to protect their business interests and their privileged position vis-à-vis the state.

As a quasi-governmental organization with strong ties to public offices, TOBB is one of the most influential organizations in Turkey and certainly the oldest, having been established in 1950. It benefits from the highest level of state funding and is legally recognized to represent the interests of the private sector. Furthermore, TOBB is important to examine insofar as it acts as an intermediary between civil-society and governmental ministries, and has far more institutionalized mechanisms of consultation with public officials. As well as sponsoring its own university, TOBB Economy and Technology University in Ankara, TOBB has a foreign and economic relations division and an international relations one. Özlem argues that TOBB operates as a kind of 'shadow foreign ministry', due to their privileged access to policy makers, international trips and position as host to foreign delegates.<sup>224</sup> This sentiment was echoed by many interviewees, specifically regarding business associations close to the government such as TUSKON prior to the Gülen split. Before this period in TFP, we could see a growing trend within Turkey in which delegations from regional governments will attend firstly or primarily, meetings with private sector organizations, which will be attended by public officials.

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<sup>224</sup> Ö.Terzi. *The Influence of the European Union on Turkish Foreign-policy*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2010. p.70

#### **2.41 Characteristics and aims**

Much of TOBBs work is technocratic and domestic, based on advising the government on decision-making that has an impact upon the Turkish business community. In terms of foreign relations however, TOBB has taken an active role under the AKP, departing from its foundations as a compulsory organization, and from its previous primary geographical focus of the EU. For example, TOBB emerged as a staunch advocate for regional free trade agreements. Rifat Hisarcıklioğlu, the chairman of TOBB, has encouraged economic development in and alongside Islamic countries through speeches at conferences and in public declarations. He has pledged TOBBs support for economic cooperation and diplomatic contact with Islamic countries and for the ongoing process of establishing chambers in Islamic countries.<sup>225</sup> The rationale for this is aligned with Davutoğlu's strategic depth concept. During the Turco-Arab Economic Forum, Hisarcıklioğlu stated that mutual Ottoman heritage should encourage and enable greater cooperation between Turkey and its Arab neighbours. He further noted that a new paradigm is emerging, one in which increasing economic integration means that cross-border action should be taken by businessmen, not armies.<sup>226</sup> This is a significant statement, indicative of the perceived move Turkey was undergoing from security-led to economic-orientated foreign relations which entails the inclusion of, and has been heavily advocated for by, business associations.

#### **2.42 Activities in foreign relations**

TOBB has assumed an active foreign-policy role in recent years and much of this seems to be orientated to the Middle East and central Asia. To these ends, it has become a member of the Islamic Chamber of Trade and Industry, it presides upon the Balkan Chambers and interestingly, due to formal requests from their respective ministries, has co-established a forum for economic cooperation and development between Turkey, Afghanistan and Pakistan, to "promote the contribution of the business world to the stability building process in the region."<sup>227</sup> Furthermore, as part of social corporate responsibility projects, TOBB is funding a variety of CSOs in Turkey who have a foreign-policy focus, most notable of which is the Turkish Economic and Political Research Foundation (TEPAV). TOBB, alongside their fraternal organization DEIK, has worked to institutionalise consultation mechanisms between business associations and public officials.<sup>228</sup> The most obvious example of which is the annual Ambassadors' Conference's working dinners which are aimed at providing a space in which businesses working abroad can discuss opportunities and constraints against foreign business

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid p.72

<sup>226</sup> R. Hisarcıklioğlu. Speech at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Turco-Arab Economy Forum, Istanbul. June 12, 2008 in Özlem., op cit. p.72

<sup>227</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012, op cit.

<sup>228</sup> Interview with Esen Çağlar TEPAV, Ankara, 12 June, 2014.



with Turkish ambassadors.<sup>229</sup> TOBBs partner organization DEIKs role in policy formation is institutionalized by their participation in the annual Joint Economic Commission.<sup>230</sup> This forum is used as a method by which bilateral economic and political relations can be mapped out and improved upon, indicative of DEIKs capacity to influence or at least participate in high level policy-making. This public-private cooperation forum has initiated projects all over Anatolia in collaboration with the US, Canada and most notably for this study, Israel. Although business associations appear to be present during such intergovernmental negotiations, there activities at the level of implementation is limited and is subsumed by public offices.

Nevertheless, there are some examples of business associations as prominent actors in foreign-policy implementation, such as TOBBs activities in establishing and coordinating the Levant Business Forum. Co-organized with DEIK in 2010, this initiative brings together high-level state and non-state actors from Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey under the mandate of furthering and entrenching economic and cultural integration. Notably, given deteriorating relations between Turkey and Syria during this time period, the existence of such forums is indicative that Turkey is either using, or at least facilitating the growth of societal networks as a kind of informal economic diplomacy, instrumental during periods of strained formal diplomatic relations. One of the primary aims of this forum is to extend visa-free and free trade agreements across the Middle East. Based on the EUs structure of Schengen, this concept has been jokingly termed *Şamgen*, in reference to the Turkish word for Damascus; *Şam*.<sup>231</sup> Although clearly an idealistic goal, the connection between economic integration and peace based on the EU model is clear in the government's economic narrative, and demonstrative of the normative rhetoric if not the ideology driving both state and business actors in establishing such forums and mechanisms of dialogue.

Abullah Gül noted the importance of including the business community in bilateral relations, arguing that "Sometimes official signatures adorn agreements but don't go beyond that. However, if the private sector signs something, it has substance. Their agreements are immediately followed by trade. If a business brings in profit, everyone wants a share and looks to its potential."<sup>232</sup> Gül, alongside Hisarcıklıoğlu both referenced the role of the state as one of

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<sup>229</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Final Declaration of the Fifth Annual Ambassadors Conference. Retrieved from; [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/final\\_declaration\\_of\\_the\\_fifth\\_annual\\_ambassadors\\_conference.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/final_declaration_of_the_fifth_annual_ambassadors_conference.en.mfa) (04/06/2014)

<sup>230</sup> DEIK Foreign Economic Relations Board. Accessed through: <http://en.deik.org.tr/287/DeikHakkinda.html> (06/05/2014)

<sup>231</sup> Erdoğan: Şengen de var Şamgen de var (There's Shengen and also Şamgen). *Sabah*. September 17, 2009. Accessed through: [http://www.sabah.com.tr/Gundem/2009/09/17/erdogan\\_sengen\\_de\\_var\\_samgen\\_de\\_var](http://www.sabah.com.tr/Gundem/2009/09/17/erdogan_sengen_de_var_samgen_de_var) 18/07/2014)

<sup>232</sup> Businessmen take huge step towards borderless Mideast. *Today's Zaman*. December 4, 2010. Accessed through: <http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail.action;jsessionid=z0ZsPtTRsCYJOYX-9eQveT8W?newsId=228678&columnistId=0> on (18/07/2014)

facilitator, and business as an actor, and supporter of the state's foreign-policy and economic goals, reflecting the neoliberal nature of the Turkish state and at the minimum, an attempt to portray the image of a decentralized foreign-policy establishment. They also took great pains to underline that such visions are in line with, or even complementary of, the EU's agenda, particularly that of EUROMED. Business organizations are invested in the EU accession process, and as such are attempting to frame Turkey's engagement in the Middle East as an opportunity for the EU rather than a threat. Such an understanding has entered into policymakers' discourse arguably in part due to greater dialogue with business actors.<sup>233</sup>

TOBB and their partners' participation in conferences involving a range of international and domestic actors is demonstrative of the increasing engagement of traditionally depoliticized actors due to the integration of the financial and political spheres. That said, TOBB's status as a quasi-governmental organization with strong links to policymakers once again devalues the idea of this being representative of democratization or pluralism. Regardless of the independence of TOBB politically however, they have clearly become a key channel through which policymakers communicate their foreign-policy agenda. Moreover, they contributed to Turkey's status as a regional mediator and economic power house. In terms of Middle East foreign relations more specifically, TOBB has clearly taken an overt interest in the region under the AKP. While it appears that this was based on government interests, they are playing a role and their activities have assisted with domestic legitimacy, increasing cultural and linguistic understanding, as well as projecting an image of a Muslim democracy with potential to play a mediating role between the East and West.

### **3. Rapprochement with the Middle East: Impact Assessment**

The impact of the aforementioned changes of expanding societal ties, visa liberalization, trade, tourism and changing discourses led, for a time, to successful rapprochement, and a shift from security heavy to economy-orientated relations with the Middle East. Diplomatic relations with Syria have been raised by policy makers as a prime example of successful use of economic interdependence for conflict resolution, described by Davutoglu as "a model of progress for the rest of the region."<sup>234</sup> The background processes facilitating this change have not been explored in terms of impact in this chapter, and thus this final section will analyse how processes of desecuritization and economic liberalization impacted on Turkey's foreign relations with these three key states, maintaining the focus on how the business community have been purveyors and beneficiaries of these changes.

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid

<sup>234</sup> Davutoglu, 2008, p. 80

Turkey's business community has rallied behind Turkey's if not new, then novel efforts at economic based regional rapprochement, and initiated some of them when its within their material and ideational interests. The business community close to the political elite were, according to Mustafa Kutlay of USAK, urged to 'go and invest abroad.'<sup>235</sup> The academic, who reigned from circles close to the government prior to the Gülen split, argued that Turkey's business elite backed state efforts to stabilize the region for the sake of economic interests. While there is a clear agenda in research such as this in entrenching the government narrative of pluralism and democratization of decision-making, this claim has been substantiated by the wealth of information on the business community's economic activities abroad which have been tied to political efforts towards rapprochement and conflict resolution. The inextricable nature of economic interests and regional stabilization is also demonstrated by Ankara's complex energy relations. Turkey is dependent on maintaining relations with contentious countries such as Iraq, Syria and particularly Iran for much needed energy resources. Turkey's dialogue and diplomacy efforts with Islamic countries such as Syria and Iran, and indeed attempts at conflict resolution represent both attempts to establish Turkey as regional interlocutor, but also economic and security needs.

Rapprochement efforts have both been enabled by changes in the political-military balance of power and encouraged by economic interests. Davutoğlu's vision of regional stability is one based on trade and investment, a continuation of the liberal/ neo-functionalist philosophy which views economic integration as the best way to build political ties and maintain peace and stability. It's important to note here that Davutoğlu takes care to highlight the need for this especially in Syria and Iraq.<sup>236</sup> Such a vision was in the interests of both the AKP and of business associations, who benefit economically from political stability. This neo-functionalist understanding of economic development and regional stability has meant that multiple channels of communication have emerged, not just at the level of high politics, but from a range of socio-economic actors, foremost of which are business associations who have become heavily involved in regional economic and political development.<sup>237</sup> Bilateral relations in many cases now begin with mutual trade and investment projects and the 'functional spill-over' effect of these economic ties arguably neutralized some of the historic prejudices between Turkey and its neighbours, particularly Syria, and northern Iraq.<sup>238</sup> Israel on the other hand represents a challenge to the spill-over thesis as despite ever-growing economic relations, diplomatic ones have deteriorated under the AKP, showing the importance of ideational and social variables and the instability of basing relations solely on the relatively depoliticized

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid., p.77

<sup>236</sup> Ibid, p.85

<sup>237</sup> For details on neo-functionalism, see E.Haas. "International integration: the European and the universal process." *International Organization* 15, no. 03 (1961): 366-392.

<sup>238</sup> L.Lindberg. *The political dynamics of European economic integration*. Stanford University Press, 1963. p.10

sphere of economic relations. Alternatively, the northern Iraq and Syria cases confirmed the vital role of economic interests and actors, as well as accompanying cultural and social connections, however also showing vulnerability to changes in political will.

### **3.1 Rapprochement with Syria**

Turkish-Syrian rapprochement in the 2000s looks to be a good example of how the various changes in the economic, political and security fields discussed in section one have impacted on foreign relations with the Middle East. Desecuritization and economic integration both facilitated the influence of non-state actors and resulted from their activities. The rising prominence of economic considerations, trade and investment arguably impelled a significant change in the rhetoric used by policy makers, the media and experts on Syria, as opposed to further entrenching the historic conflict at both a state and societal level. What speaks volumes is the proliferation of studies, reports and statements from CSOs on Syria over the past decade and a half, whereas the military have been largely silent on this topic.

The underlying context behind such changes in political culture and practice are the ongoing themes of this thesis: desecuritization and economic liberalization. While numerous factors internal both to Syria and Turkey such as changing approaches to the PKK, water and land disputes, political will with the rise of Assad and the AKP all facilitated rapprochement from the 1990s onwards, these have been discussed in chapter two on the historical overview as alternative and underlying factors that allowed for a new political thinking towards bilateral relations. As such, this sub-section highlights the societal factors and actors involved in the economic sphere. It argues that economic interest groups were intrinsic not to Turkey's normalization with Syria, which was largely a government led initiative, but rather to the accompanying economic and societal changes which facilitated normalization. However, this section will conclude that these newly established ties were not sufficient in the face of changing political will on both sides, and when security concerns rose anew, relations collapsed.

The rise of the AKP and their new vision for economic interdependence and regional stabilization was intrinsic to the unprecedented expansion of relations in the early 2000s, particularly, since 2009 – which notably coincided with peak of aggressive desecuritization in the country following the Ergenekon trials and the overhaul of the entire military bureaucracy. Notably insofar as this allowed for a change in approach, channels of interaction and actors involved in Turkey's relations with Syria. Due to economic crises on both sides of the border, economic factors have been important from the onset of rapprochement with Syria, although as aforementioned, were ancillary to political developments. Business associations were involved at an international level with lobbying for free trade and visa liberalization, and at the domestic level, in democratization efforts and desecuritization which it is argued here, had

a significant effect on changing relations with Syria. This is due to the subsequent emergence of a political culture more conducive to non-security based decision-making and the emergence of new discourses by which to legitimize Turkey's relations with the country, and the region more broadly. As elites in Syria and Turkey toned down their discourse, replacing militaristic language with economic focussed discourses, there was a reciprocal effect on their actions. However, securitization and desecuritization do not take place outside the context in which they are formed. As such, the actors and material conditions driving the de-securitization of Turkish-Syrian relations will be focussed on in this analysis, alongside an examination of changing discourses.

Turkey and Syria have strengthened relations in security, political and economic spheres since the signing of the Adana Accords. Unlike previous eras, this has largely been at the behest of civilian elites, even within the spheres of security and defence which was previously under almost unilateral control of the NSC. Under the AKP, the two countries established unprecedented bilateral ventures: military exercises, technical military agreements, the aforementioned Turkish-Syrian High Level Strategic Cooperation Council, as well as opening up new trade routes, lifting visa requirements and cooperating on regional mediation efforts with Iraq and Israel amongst others. Early trade and commerce-based partnerships were translated into institutionalized mechanisms of communication such as the High Councils of Strategic Cooperation, the High Level Cooperation Council (a proposal for the development and expansion of special economic free zones) and the Turkish-Syrian Business Council, as well as mutual chambers of commerce and trade associations.<sup>239</sup> These cooperation council meetings in particular have been argued to be indicative of a new depth to relations with Middle Eastern countries, and have been established with Iraq, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon to institutionalize economic integration. They are run as bilateral annual meetings with actors from the Prime Minister down, including ministers of trade, foreign affairs, energy and interior affairs.<sup>240</sup>

It is argued here that the new economic basis of bilateral relations paved the way for the upgrade of diplomatic relations experienced in the 2000s, most obviously, Bashar al-Asad's visit to Turkey in January 2004. It was during this visit that both Davutoğlu and Asad first publicly pledged their commitment to developing a free trade zone. This high-level planning was run in convergence with a multitude of low-level business forums established to discuss strategies for furthering economic cooperation and trust-building activities. It is important to note here that Turkish-Syrian rapprochement became a gateway to deepening MENA relations across the board, particularly in the economic sphere which give greater agency to economic

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<sup>239</sup> Babacan, 2010, op cit, p. 14.

<sup>240</sup> Tur, op cit, p.596.

actors. For example, the Gaziantep Chamber of Industry (GSO) was successfully involved in lobbying the government to open a Syrian consulate in the city, as well as a Turkish-Iraqi work forum.<sup>241</sup> Furthermore, the GSO effectively lobbied governments in both Turkey and Syria to build border trading centre, and secured signatures from both to this effect.<sup>242</sup> Similar regional integration efforts have been launched by the government. Speaking at a conference organized by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Davutoğlu emphasized the importance of creating a Middle East union to implement full economic interdependency. He raised Turkish-Syrian rapprochement as the primary example of economic interdependency negating the need for a securitized approach, referencing the mines which lined the border not 10 years ago which have been largely removed due to bilateral and multi-level efforts from the state, supranational organizations and civilian groups, resulting from visa-free travel and mutual trust since 2003.<sup>243</sup>

Yet it was still overarching political changes that allowed for the privileging of economic as opposed to security concerns. As discussed in the historical overview, Syria's changing policy towards the PKK, attempts by Özal to resolve the Hatay issue and water disputes as well as the AKP's rise and Asad were the dominating political circumstances that facilitated changes in approach, language and channels of bilateral relations with Syria. That said, pragmatic and material interests drove Turkey to seek normalization with Syria outside of diplomatic motivations, predominantly rooted in economic interests. While Turkey increasingly viewed Syria as a gateway for lucrative trade, particularly with the Gulf, Syria seemingly responded to Turkey's growing ties with the EU, which would be valuable both in economic terms and political ones while Syria continued to suffer from international isolation. President Erdoğan's visit to Syria in 2004 to sign the proposed Free Trade Agreement came on the heels of intensifications of the EU-Turkey accession process. The timing of this is not coincidental and underlines how important European markets and business was to conflict resolution between Turkey and Syria. Trade and investment skyrocketed following this visit, particularly following the Free Trade Agreement operationalized in 2007. Yet despite the economic focus and influx of human capital as businessmen from both sides of the border took advantage of new economic opportunities, it appears that political will for cooperation still dominated.

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<sup>241</sup> Gaziantep Sanayi Odası, Trademark City Gaziantep Branding Project. *World Chambers Competition*, 2005. Accessed through; [file:///C:/Users/Harri/Downloads/Gaziantep\\_Chamber\\_project\\_description.pdf](file:///C:/Users/Harri/Downloads/Gaziantep_Chamber_project_description.pdf) (13/08/2014)

<sup>242</sup> Ibid

<sup>243</sup> Manama Dialogue. The IISS Regional Security Summit. Regional Security Cooperation: Ahmet Davutoğlu. *IISS*. Accessed through; <http://www.iiss.org/en/events/manama%20dialogue/archive/manama-dialogue-2010-3790/first-plenary-session-b7e2/ahmet-davutoglu-ed72> (12/08/2014)

More generally, Turkish businesses were becoming heavily involved in Syria before the crisis, working alongside the Turkish government on infrastructure building.<sup>244</sup> Furthermore, bilateral projects in both tourism and industry were expanding before the onset of the crisis. 2009 saw the peak of rapprochement efforts with the lifting of visa requirements and the decision to form the High Level Strategic Cooperation Council taken during a meeting to promote high level economic cooperation which included business associations and policy makers.<sup>245</sup> The 2010 Turkish-Syrian Business Council's conference on investment in the Syrian coast highlighted just how much economic relations had grown between the two nations as Zafer Çağlayan, the Turkish Minister of State for Foreign Trade reported that Turkish investment in Syria stood at \$724 million before the AKP came to power, reaching \$2.5 billion by 2010.<sup>246</sup> Business events of this size should be included under the remit of foreign relations insofar as they enable dialogue not only between high level policy-makers on both sides, but also incorporate non-state actors and international institutions. Furthermore, ever increasing trade partnerships may be one of the factors influencing Turkey's decision to act as a mediator in the Syrian-Israeli conflict. Without the diplomatic spill-over of flourishing economic relations, Turkey would not have been positioned to act as a mediator. Thus, although business associations were not directly involved in these negotiations, they certainly facilitated these talks. However, such efforts were fruitless due, in part, to the deterioration of Turkish-Israeli relations since Mavi Marmara, highlighting how the interplay of multiple interest groups, in this case the IHH acting as a constraint on state-level resolution efforts, can impact on foreign relations as well as the enduring supremacy of political will.

The Turkish-Syrian Conference of Local Authorities is perhaps most demonstrative of attempts at decentralization and societal empowerment to alleviate some of the vulnerability posed by unilateral state-level rapprochement. Sponsored by the EU, the emphasis was on the role of local authorities and demonstrates an effort to decentralize power under the remit of desecuritization and democratization. Within this conference, we see consistent reference to and inclusion of regional civil-society networks in the development of bilateral ties. The president of the Union of Turkish World Municipalities, Erol Kaya asserted that CSOs were involved at all levels of local development, from control to decision-making and practice, extending the impact of this to a regional level by twinning Turkish and Syrian towns (such as the coupling of Latakia and Mersin in 2008) and encouraging civil-society, economic, and

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<sup>244</sup> "Güriş ile Suriye'de 280 milyonluk Yatırımla (Güriş's 280 million investment in Syria) Yeni Safak, January 16, 2011.

<sup>245</sup> Özlem Tur. "Turkish-Syrian relations-where are we going?." UNISCI Discussion Papers 23 (2010): 163-175.

<sup>246</sup> 'Conference on Investment in Syrian Coast Kicks Off / 60 Turkish Firms Participating', *Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA)*, 3 Oct. 2010. Retrieved from; <http://sana.sy/eng/24/2010/10/03/311036.htm> (14/05/2014)

political partnerships as well as social development.<sup>247</sup> This system of “sister cities” as it’s known in Turkish has an overt agenda in foreign relations. It represents one of many examples of AKP policy makers attempting to foster bilateral ties through non-state actors, particularly NGOs involved in cultural exchange such as a women’s association; the International Centre of Culture and Art, but also involving trade delegations and academia.<sup>248</sup>

The asserted purpose of this conference was to discuss economic development in terms of exports, trade efficiency and furthering economic integration based on multi-lateral partnerships in social, cultural and political fields. There was high-level participation, not just at the ministerial level but from the EU and including large delegations of businessmen from both countries. The level of trade between Turkey and Syria was discussed, and cited as standing at \$1 billion, expected to double by 2011. The relationship between respective business sectors was primary on the agenda, as well as proposals local-level partnerships in the spheres of tourism and investment. The multiple trade-agreements, in many cases signed or sponsored by business associations, were cited as one of the main facilitators of increasing trade efficiency, as well as the ongoing plans for joint-cooperation and direct investor contact. The decentralization of certain elements of decision-making in Turkey was raised as a possible model for Syria, in which local authorities and businesses have been directly involved in provincial development projects. The Turkish experience of modernization and economic development was also raised as a successful structure to be implemented in Syria, with coordination between SMEs and local administrations seen as the driving force behind Turkey’s economic growth. Erdoğan’s April 2007 visit to Damascus illustrates the role of business associations in promoting the Turkish model. Erdoğan attended the Syrian-Turkish Business Council meeting during which he called on Syrians to follow the Turkish economic reform process.<sup>249</sup> This promotion of the Turkish model is a consistent theme for civil-society activities in the Middle East and is indicative of why the government initially promoted their participation in high-level events. It is also explanatory of the demise of civil-society since 2013, when the Gezi Park protests spurred widespread criticism of the so-called Turkish model.

Changes in security realities and the attitudes of high-level policy-makers were the crucial factors behind Turkish-Syrian rapprochement, as can be seen in the rapid deterioration in

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<sup>247</sup> Türkiye-Suriye Yerel Yönetimler Kongresi sona erdi. (Turkey-Syria Local Authorities Congress ended) Zaman. December 10, 2006. Accessed through: [http://www.zaman.com.tr/gundem\\_turkiye-suriye-yerel-yonetimler-kongresi-sona-erdi\\_469359.html](http://www.zaman.com.tr/gundem_turkiye-suriye-yerel-yonetimler-kongresi-sona-erdi_469359.html) (08/08/14)

<sup>248</sup> İzmir Büyükşehir Belediyesi. Dış ilişkiler koordinatörük ve kardeş şehirler 2006. (Foreign relations coordination and sister cities 2006). Accessed through: [http://www.izmir.bel.tr/YuklenenDosyalar/Dokumanlar/25.12.2013%2011\\_11\\_32\\_disliskilerkardeskenntller.pdf](http://www.izmir.bel.tr/YuklenenDosyalar/Dokumanlar/25.12.2013%2011_11_32_disliskilerkardeskenntller.pdf) (08/08/14)

<sup>249</sup> S.Moubayed: “Turkish-Syrian Relations: The Erdoğan Legacy”, SETA Policy Brief, no. 25 (October2008), p.5.



relations since 2012. However, this does not mean that economic ties and interest groups are insignificant, but rather that they are insufficient should state-level and systemic forces begin to breed conflict. This once again shows that societal ties are an ancillary part of foreign relations: most influential during periods of rapprochement and conflict resolution, only able to play a role should environmental circumstances allow. This is especially true for Turkish-Syrian relations, which required political will to catalyse business actors' interest and involvement in the country. The level of hostility prior to the early 2000s arguably too large a barrier for civil-society to transgress alone, however business associations were quick to capitalize on the growing economic and security ties necessitated by the Iraq War and facilitated by the EU accession process to fulfil Turkey's vision of becoming a gateway to European markets. Desecuritization and conflict resolution initiatives begun by the government were quickly taken up by business associations, and these groups arguably formed important channels of communication, legitimacy and incentives for furthering economic integration and rapprochement.

### **3.2 Desecuritizing Northern Iraqi Policy**

As discussed in chapter two, desecuritization and economic liberalization, particularly the energy priorities and regional strategizing of Turkey in establishing itself as an energy hub, had a significant impact on relations with northern Iraq. This change can be seen not only through the significant rise in energy-based trade volume under the AKP, but also the manner in which security operations in the region have been pursued. This section will briefly explore decision-making regarding military action Iraq in 2008, in comparison to 1995 as exemplary of how desecuritization and civilianization enabled the increasing input of non-state actors. Furthermore, it will explore how in certain instances, strategic and military-based decision-making can be superseded by economic considerations, driven in part by the private sector and CSOs. This will be shown to be particularly visible with northern Iraq, a region which has been subject to intense investment from Turkish companies.

Kirişçi argues that in stark contrast with the 1995 military decision for an intervention in northern Iraq which was top-down and primarily instigated by the military elite, the February 2008 invasion in which 10,000 ground troops were deployed following intensive PKK activity, TSK raids and clashes from 2007 onwards was set against a back-drop of public debate, involving the consultation of a range of domestic and international interest groups, including consultation with Kurdish-born Iraqi President Jalal Talabani. Troops were withdrawn swiftly, on February 29, due to international and domestic pressure. Non-governmental participation primarily took the form of track II diplomatic activities, from think tanks to business associations, most notably through the Diyarbakır Chamber of Commerce and Industry who

maintained dialogue with the KRG during this period.<sup>250</sup> Kirişçi describes the differences in political process in the 1995 and 2008 operations in Northern Iraq as reflective of ‘two different eras in Turkish foreign-policy’, theorizing a transition from security-orientated to economic policy-making.<sup>251</sup> Although true to an extent, this analysis overstates the transition Turkey has undergone since desecuritization. The military is still a dominant channel through which Turkey engages with the region, and much of the news of the incursion was announced via the Turkish General Staff’s website. Further, despite business associations suffering from military interventions due to the economic repercussions, rather than standing in direct opposition to the military, business interest groups seemingly exerted their economic interests within the traditional security context of the military elite. Defence associations such as the Defence and Aerospace Industry Manufacturers’ (SASAD) share a core membership with TÜSIAD and have engaged in policy dialogue with the TSK over the course of military interventions.<sup>252</sup>

Despite the enduring political power of the military to dictate foreign relations, far exceeding security, the differences raised by Kirişçi in the actors involved, negotiations and the addition of informal diplomatic channels between Turkey and the KRG during the 2008 operation do indeed indicate some transition in the level of securitization in TFP. Another core difference was that civilian casualties, and perhaps from a cynical point of view, civilian infrastructure damage, was kept to a bare minimum. Furthermore, trade routes remained open during the operation. Not only was it limited so as to not damage regional business ties, it was framed as sensitive to domestic politics, namely, civil liberties in Turkey’s Kurdish cities. In an interview with CNN Turk, Davutoğlu emphasised that the successfully limited nature of this operation not only demonstrated Turkey’s capacity to use soft-power, but also to maintain a balance between democracy and security.<sup>253</sup> Although much of this is self-aggrandizing rhetoric, the framing and implementation of Turkey’s northern Iraq policy has evidently changed in the past decade, and it is argued here, building upon the historical analysis in chapter three, that this is reflective of the growing inclusion of economic interests and economic interest groups in TFP.<sup>254</sup>

Within these specific operations, we can see elements of the paradigm shift discussed by Kirişçi, transitioning from militarization to economic-based decision-making under the AKP. These economic discourses are indicative of the decline of the security elite insofar as virulent anti-Kurdish policies and actors were replaced by policy makers and business actors who

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<sup>250</sup> Kirişçi, op cit. p.30

<sup>251</sup> Ibid, p.31

<sup>252</sup> For full lists of SASAD members see: <http://www.sasad.org.tr/uyelera.asp>; and for a full list of TUSIAD see: <http://www.tusiad.org/FileArchive/2000FaaliyetRapor.pdf>

<sup>253</sup> Davutoğlu. 2008, op cit. p.80

<sup>254</sup> Ibid

privilege trade above all else, even Turkey's enduring conflict with Kurdish communities. That said, Turkey's broader relations with Iraq under the AKP, when compared to the 1990s, do not indicate anything so extraordinary, but rather the learning of past mistakes. The security failures of Turkey's participation in the Gulf War as well as the economic costs made them far more cautious, as discussed in the historical overview. The key difference then, arguably still a reaction first to Özal's policies and then to the unilateral nature of the 1995 Operation Steel – the failure of the operation to quash the PKK and the strain it put on Turkey's foreign relations with the US and Europe – was desecuritization and the growing power of civilian institutions and CSOs to debate and make policy regarding the Kurdish issue both domestically and regionally.

The new energy seen in Turkish-Iraqi relations based upon issue-specific desecuritization, economic interdependence and the use of economic tools to ensure Turkey's strategic and security needs. The Turkish business community has become very active in Iraq and has become an important driver of these processes, and of socio-economic transformation within northern Iraq itself. Iraq in 2013 was Turkey's second biggest market for exports, receiving \$11,949 million's worth of imports.<sup>255</sup> Although data was not available regarding northern Iraq's share in this, Turkish business is flourishing in the region, surpassing the EU and the US and only second to China. According to Abdul Razad, the Governor of Baghdad, "Turkey is always one step ahead of others."<sup>256</sup> Turkish investment has also been crucial in contributing to institution building in Iraqi Kurdistan such as transport and telecommunications infrastructure and health facilities, one project of which was the Erbil Cardiac Centre which was a cooperative venture between Austrian, Turkish and Kurdish investors.<sup>257</sup>

Turkey's business community has been active in increasing economic and political ties between Istanbul and Erbil. Based on the discussion of the connection between economic interests and rapprochement put forth in section one of this chapter, and the historic prejudice rife among policy elites as explored in chapter two, it appears that Turkish business actors were important in laying the necessary foundations for rapprochement. For example, they secured an agreement between governments in Turkey and Iraq to enable fly-over rights for Kurdistan Airlines, allowing growth in both the tourism and business sectors.<sup>258</sup> One of the core demands of businesspeople operating in the region is the opening of more direct trade routes between Diyarbakır and Erbil and they have been engaged in lobbying to this end. They have succeeded in establishing direct flights between the cities to enable the growth of economic relations. Turkish and Kurdish business associations continue to lobby regarding the

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<sup>255</sup> Undersecretariat for Foreign Trade, op cit.

<sup>256</sup> Kurtaran, op cit.

<sup>257</sup> USAID Report, Kurdistan Region Economic Development Assessment, Dec. 2008, p.30

<sup>258</sup> Müftüler-Baç, 2014, op cit. p.12

opening of more border gates which would facilitate a greater volume of trade.<sup>259</sup> Relations between the two are based on energy demands, and as with the case of Israel, domestic energy consumption is prompting Turkey to use energy as a tool of soft-power, but also related to regional power ambitions as Turkey is attempting to integrate (predominantly northern) Iraqi oil into the European market, with its own business community playing a role in the implementation of the Nabucco pipeline project.<sup>260</sup>

Ankara's normalization with northern Iraq is clearly related to Turkey's ambitions to become a regional energy hub. However, Turkey's engagement in Kurdistan certainly isn't limited to energy. Construction is a rapidly growing sector and one that is contingent on Turkey's involvement, with 95% of Kurdistan's \$2.8 billion construction market controlled by the Turkish business community.<sup>261</sup> The Kurdistan Contractors' Union is home to 51 Turkish firms now, showing the growing partnership between the Turkish private sector/ business associations and foreign CSOs.<sup>262</sup> By 2010, trade with northern Iraq had risen to \$5.2 billion and there were a number of initiatives that year by both business associations and the government to continue increasing trade volume. Foreign Trade Minister Zafer Çağlayan made an announcement to this effect, and organizations such as TÜGİAD (the Young Businessmen Association of Turkey) visited Erbil soon after in an attempt to capitalize on this political will. The association has formed a northern Iraq Trade Committee and met with political representatives from the KRG. TÜGİAD Chairman Lütfü Küçük argued it was time to adopt a "little problem, more trade" strategy whilst calling on Turkey's business community to invest in northern Iraq, perhaps unknowingly echoing Çağlayan's statement to the same effect.<sup>263</sup> This is just one example of the symbiosis between trade and diplomacy in the early 2000s, with business associations attending and organizing high level meetings, lobbying for the opening of new flight routes and pursuing economic opportunities.

Turkey is attempting to create regional stability, through a combination of mediation efforts and economic interdependence. The northern Iraq example is demonstrative of this foreign-policy outlook, an outlook which demands the participation of non-governmental organizations, in this case; business associations. Business associations have acted as a lobby, promoting regional stability and security through mediation activities to serve their economic interests. Unlike Syria, there was an element of politics following trade rather than vice-versa

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<sup>259</sup> Peace Bid 'to Help Trade in Southeastern Turkey'. *Good Morning Turkey*. November 20, 2013. Accessed on: <http://www.goodmorningturkey.com/peace-bid-help-trade-southeastern-turkey/> (18/07/2014)

<sup>260</sup> O. Rehn. (2009). EU Commissioner for Enlargement Speech: Turkey as an energy hub for Europe: prospects and challenges. European Policy Centre.

<sup>261</sup> USAID Report, op cit, p.26

<sup>262</sup> Ibid p.26

<sup>263</sup> Turkish Business Visits North Iraq, Hurriyet Daily News. Accessed through: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-business-association-visits-north-iraq.aspx?pageID=438&n=business-association-visits-north-iraq-2010-04-09>

found during the research on Turkish-northern Iraqi relations. Opportunism from the business community, lobbying for the opening of borders and new flight routes as well as the underlying individual connections forged by increased trade seemingly paved the way for controversial moves towards building diplomatic ties with the KRG. That said, the enduring primacy of the military over security matters was also evident in this case, highlighted in the analysis of changing dynamics in military operations – which were not found to be as significant as Kirişçi theorised, and although desecuritization opened a space for civilian and non-state actors, continued PKK cross-border activity and ethno-politics means that civilianization of foreign-policy has its limits.

### **3.3 Economic Diplomacy and Israel/ Palestine**

Whereas relations with Syria and Iraq have been driven predominantly by political will and economic interest, with the inclusion of business associations largely in a post hoc manner, relations with Israel differ. This is arguably due to the relatively well-developed nature of Turkish-Israeli diplomatic and economic ties upon the AKP's accession to power. Following the onset of a state-level diplomatic crisis after Mavi Marmara, the business community mobilized however, likely due to the threat this posed to lucrative trade between the two countries. Furthermore, some organizations extended their remit outside of the economic sphere – which dominated the business community's activities and discourses towards the rest of the Middle East – and attempted to take on an active role in conflict resolution. This extended past bilateral relations to the Israel-Palestinian conflict as the main source of trouble for Turkish-Israeli ties. This section will analyse the fluctuations in Turkish-Israeli relations from a socio-economic perspective, focussing on the period leading up to, and culminating in the Mavi Marmara crisis insofar as it provided both the catalyst for, and a limitation on, business associations' role in foreign relations.

The election of the AKP had a significant effect on Turkish-Israeli relations towards the end of the decade. Efforts to desecuritize foreign-policy and the expansion of economic ties to the rest of the Middle East left much less room for Israel in the new millennium than during the golden age of Turkish-Israeli relations in the 1990s, wherein, despite having an avowedly anti-Israeli government, security realities necessitated good relations with the country. An alliance based almost exclusively on mutual security needs however was vulnerable in the changing political environment regarding threat perception of key states such as Syria, Iraq and Iran following the election of the AKP. The government's desecuritized and increasingly economic-based and ideational regional view no longer understood Turkey as "surrounded on all sides by trouble" or believed that "It is critical for [Turkey] to jump outside this circle of chaos and find friends in the region [and that] Israel was the perfect choice".<sup>264</sup> By linking

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<sup>264</sup> Balci, and Kardaş, op cit. p.105

cooperation with Israel so intimately to a securitized worldview, once perception of what constituted a threat to Turkey changed, relations with Israel were bound to deteriorate.

Compounded by the rise of civil-society actors, increased media freedoms and a change in the balance of civil-military relations, the new millennium brought forth new challenges for the AKP's relations with Israel. The post-liberalization emergence of civil-society as a foreign-policy actor had a significant impact on the development of Turkey's moral/ ethical discourse regarding human (and particularly Palestinian) rights. This emergence of a value-laden foreign-policy approach will be explored in detail in chapter four, however it is important to note here that these societal influences also stimulated other policies, which in this context, have emerged as economic growth, renewing relations with vital economic partners such as Syria and Iraq. Both these developments are particularly alienating regarding the continuation of Turkish-Israeli ties since Erdoğan's infamous 'one-minute' incident during which he stormed out of the World Economic Forum at Davos after a confrontation with Shimon Peres, and even more so, since Mavi Marmara. Despite the subsequent secession of diplomatic relations however, certain business associations have capitalized on the opportunities offered by Turkey's changing role as a mediating power, as well as its growing economy, and renewed relations with Israel in unexpected and innovative ways, most notable of which is TOBBs Industry for Peace Initiative, which brought leaders from Palestine, Turkey and Israel to the negotiating table at a time when high-level diplomacy was frozen. Given Turkey's subsequent rapprochement with Israel, it would appear that such initiatives maintained an important if informal relationship between the two states at a time of conflict.

One of the most salient examples of the rise of private sector-civil-society collaborative ventures when state-level diplomacy fails is TOBBs 'Industry for Peace Initiative.' TOBB has partnered with a range of private and civil-society organizations (most importantly, TEPAV) to develop industrial parks across the region, with the simultaneous goals of economic development and conflict resolution. The inclusion of TEPAV means that although business interests lie at the heart of this venture, there is also an overt political goal regarding the promotion and institutionalization of regional stability and socio-economic development, a continuing them of the government's foreign-policy approach. Esen Çağlar, deputy managing director of TEPAV, described the motivation for this project as one based on a conceptualization of conflict resolution as most effective when done bottom up- starting with ground design, technical and contained issues and scaling up from there.<sup>265</sup> TEPEV and TOBBs work focuses on capacity building, institution-building, donor coordination, strategic planning and knowledge transfer. Their guiding principles are that economic growth in the

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<sup>265</sup> Interview with Çağlar op cit.

Middle East has been inhibited by “endemic political problems” and that the solution to this is private sector development and market oriented economic advancement.<sup>266</sup> Such a solution is derived from an asserted causality between economic growth and democratization based on the Turkish experience.

TOBBs idea is that “transplanting” the Turkish economic model of Organized Industrial Zones through micro-level knowledge transfer and business association networks will eventually have a bottom-up impact on macro-level political institutions and ‘contribute to the resolution of political disputes’.<sup>267</sup> Such a vision of political transformation is echoed across Turkish civil-society in terms of democratization efforts and conflict resolution, but in this instance, seemingly removes the necessity of direct state-level political administration and instead, to a degree, this initiative claims political agency for the private sector and civilian actors, institutionalizing non-state policy dialogue mechanisms. Furthermore, the inclusion of the international community in this venture highlights the ability of previously depoliticized actors in Turkey to compete with the role traditionally played by states. TOBBs chairman Hisarcıkloğlu, has held high level meetings with a range of international actors involved in the Palestinian peace process, from James Wolfensohn, the Quartet’s Special Envoy for Disengagement to Marc Otte, the EU commissioner for Enlargement, alongside representatives from the World Bank and USAID.<sup>268</sup> TEPAV noted the inclusion of international actors as a possible mechanism for conflict prevention, putting pressure on the Israeli military to ensure the safety of cargo during transportation.<sup>269</sup> Hisarcıkloğlu is also the co-chair of the Jerusalem Arbitration Centre, an organization established as a mechanism for the peaceful resolution of commercial conflicts between Israel and Palestine. This organization also asserts its will to “serve as a bridge for the peace process”.<sup>270</sup> This integration of Turkish, Israeli and Palestinian business communities, as well as civil actors is a clear departure from pre-2002 Turkish-Israeli relations. The existence of such sub and trans-state dialogue mechanisms has been argued to operate as a stabilizing force in bilateral relations.

Collaboration between the Turkish, Israeli and Palestinian private sectors has been institutionalized under the Ankara Forum for Economic Cooperation. This forum aims at creating mechanisms for trilateral dialogue regarding social and economic development and

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid

<sup>267</sup> Esen Çağlar and Neslihan Kaptanoğlu, TOBB-BIS Industry for Peace Initiative; The Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey. Concept and Implementation. (TEPAV|EPRI) Accessed through: [http://www.tepav.org.tr/upload/files/1265709030r8671.Industry\\_for\\_Peace\\_Initiative.pdf](http://www.tepav.org.tr/upload/files/1265709030r8671.Industry_for_Peace_Initiative.pdf) (08/05/2014)

<sup>268</sup> Ibid, p.10

<sup>269</sup> Interview with Çağlar, op cit.

<sup>270</sup> E.Sağlam, Turkish chair takes offices at Middle East arbitration center (March 29, 2013) *Hurriyet Daily News*. Retrieved from; <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-chair-takes-offices-at-middle-east-arbitration-center.aspx?pageID=238&nID=43866&NewsCatID=344> (06/05/2014)

conflict resolution, claiming to be “the first much needed civil-society initiative of the Middle East peace process”.<sup>271</sup> This approach falls clearly within the scope of track II diplomacy in its focus on confidence building, institutional capacity building, trade and investment and trilateral business ventures through joint working groups and dialogue. Concrete projects regarding tourism- the Holy Lands Excursion, organized by Turkey, and the Erez Industrial Zone are their main economic foci, alongside the promotion of a more politicized agenda of public-private sector dialogue and policy research. The first aim of the Ankara Forum is to ‘obtain the necessary political decisions in Palestine and Israel and sign the Memorandums of Understanding.’<sup>272</sup> Such an aim has been implemented by the facilitation of tripartite decision-making and high level diplomatic meetings held by TOBBs partner organization; TEPAV, between Shimon Peres, Mahmud Abbas and Abdullah Gül, a unique meeting at that time, which arguably would not have been possible were it not for TOBB and TEPAV’s peace-building activities between all parties involved. Given the AKP’s unprecedented involvement in conflict resolution between Israel and Palestine, such work would seemingly be in coordination or at least, complementary of, Turkish foreign-policy objectives. In fact, this venture was described as Erdoğan’s “baby” by one Israeli official.<sup>273</sup>

Esen Çağlar described this rather as “everyone’s baby”, noting the support not just of the Prime Minister, but of Abdullah Gül and Davutoğlu. Accordingly, this project was closely followed by, and formed in coordination with, the Turkish ambassadors in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, as well as with the Ministry of Middle Eastern affairs due to the projects unique nature. However, funding for such ventures remains problematic. A request was made to the Turkish government to fund this project, however due to TİKA’s focus on social rather than economic aid, the project was stalled for two years (TİKA for example was heavily involved in the establishment of the Gaza-Turkish Palestine Friendship Hospital).<sup>274</sup> TEPAV eventually provided the funding themselves, and are now working in coordination with the German, rather than Turkish government, although this project is still sanctioned and condoned by the AKP. This highlights the economic lacunae in Turkey’s foreign-policy agenda and in part explains the rising power of economic associations who have the skills and funding avenues to pursue international development projects autonomously from the state. Despite the Turkish government’s recent lack of financial involvement, the mere existence of joint ventures such as this, involving a range of governmental and non-governmental actors, is indicative of changes in the style and tools of TFP.

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid

<sup>272</sup> Çağlar and Kaptanoğlu, op cit. p.11

<sup>273</sup> S.Bahour, Economic Prison Zones. *Middle East Research and Information Project*. (November 19, 2010) Retrieved from; <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero111910> (08/05/2014)

<sup>274</sup> Republic of Turkey, Turkish Consulate General in Jerusalem. Accessed through: <http://jerusalem.cg.mfa.gov.tr/ShowInfoNotes.aspx?ID=284574>



Economic associations such as TEPAV were in a unique position regarding inter-state diplomacy under the AKP's first two terms. During interviews, TEPAV emphasised that much of their knowledge of conflict resolution, which has most recently been applied to Israel-Palestine, was derived from their experiences in managing interactions between interior ministries, which Çağlar claimed to be often more testing than negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians.<sup>275</sup> Essentially, TOBB is utilizing its experience in domestic policy bargaining to mediate and develop mutually beneficial projects for Palestinian and Israeli business associations. This transfer of concrete policy-based technical knowledge to bilateral conflict resolution efforts highlights the hybridization of business interest group's agenda and remit. As aforementioned, TOBB and TEPAV also work closely with international organizations on this project; predominantly the EU, the World Bank, the OECD and UNDP. By operating in this manner and engaging directly in policy negotiations with regional and international organizations as well as governments, Turkish business associations are providing significant networks and multilateral partnerships which are strong enough to withstand political turmoil; an important aspect of foreign relations which was almost non-existent prior to the AKP.

Endemic state-level political problems between Turkey and Israel have not had any impact on such projects, nor economic relations more broadly, arguably due to the expansion of non-governmental ties. Both countries continued to expand their economic relations at an ever-increasing rate, seemingly defying norms of economic interdependence necessitating a level of political cooperation. Starting from \$449 million in 1996, bilateral trade has flourished under the AKP's jurisdiction. In 2011, the last recorded statistics on the Ministry of Economy, imports from Israel stood at \$2 billion with \$2.4 billion being exported to Israel (it is notable that no such statistics have been offered since 2012 however). This exponential growth all during a time which by all accounts, is the worst period of Turkish-Israeli relations since Israel's inception. Between 2002 and 2008, a period in which political relations were taut, but not catastrophic, bilateral trade increased by 14.6 %. Although, the growth rate in 2009 fell quite dramatically, by 28 %, this was attributed to the global financial crisis rather than political relations by Uriel Lynn, the president of the Federation of Israeli Chambers of Commerce.<sup>276</sup> By 2010, bilateral trade was back to previous levels, with a 30.7 % increase seen between 2010 and 2011, the most political tumultuous time for Turkish-Israeli relations. Notably, trade relations peaked in 2008 and again in 2010, coinciding with Operation Cast Lead and the Mavi Marmara incident respectively. Both these events initiated times of intense political instability between and within the two countries, yet the spectres of Operation Cast Lead, Davos and Mavi Marmara, although haunting discourse and diplomacy, have had a

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<sup>275</sup> Interview Çağlar, op cit.

<sup>276</sup> S.Wrobel. "Investment firm: Divest from Turkey." *The Jerusalem Post*, June 6th 2010. Accessed through: <http://www.jpost.com/LandedPages/PrintArticle.aspx?id=177120> (28/09/2015)

negligible impact on blossoming trade relations between Turkey and Israel. Thus, despite being described diplomatically as ‘the impossible mathematical equation,’ in terms of economic relations, ‘zero-problems’ appears to be holding strong.<sup>277</sup>

Furthermore, although military activities were cancelled after Mavi Marmara, defence contracts were not. Just a month after this incident, Turkey's \$183 million contract with Israeli Aerospace Industries and Israeli-based international defence company, Elbit was fulfilled. Similarly, the multiple partnerships between Turkish and Israeli firms, particularly in the areas of defence, automotive and technology industries, continue unabated, such as the deal between Turkish Aselsan and Israeli Military Industries to upgrade battle tanks.<sup>278</sup> Similarly, Turkish businesses participation in an Israeli company Better Place's production of the Renault-Nissan Fluence Z.E, and electric cars, which are being manufactured in Bursa continues unhindered.<sup>279</sup> Such joint ventures are common, although Israeli companies see it as in their best interests to conceal their identity whilst working in Turkey by cooperating with Turkish manufacturers. This means that although Israeli products are expansive in Turkey, particularly in the realms medical and advanced software technology, this is not obvious in the manufacturing details. For example, despite the post-Mavi Marmara ban on cooperation in the fields of water and energy, much of the equipment used for agricultural and water technology is supplied by Israel directly to local Turkish administrations.<sup>280</sup>

Nevertheless, Turkey's economic integration with Israel has been intimately linked to government control and encouragement, even at a time when Erdoğan and Netanyahu have sought to distance themselves from each other ideationally and politically. An example of this can be found in 2012, when Halman Aldubi, an Israeli investment firm, announced that it would divest from Turkey in reaction to Turkey's objection to the Mavi Marmara incident, stating that “Turkey is on a militant path aimed at strategically damaging Israel, and there is no reason for Israeli investment houses to help the Turkish economy.”<sup>281</sup> They urged other investment houses to coordinate with this plan, until Turkey adopts a new, more pro-Israeli policy. This was followed swiftly by pressure from Uriel Lynn on the business sector to refrain from letting political relations damage economic ones. This statement was made in coordination with a call from his Turkish counterpart in TOBB, Hisarcıklioğlu, who has repeatedly promised that political instability will not damage the ever increasingly economic ties between the two countries. As Menashe Carmon, the president of the Israel-Turkey

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<sup>277</sup> A.Lapidot-Firilla. “Turkey: From State to Faith-Based NGO”, The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, 2010.

<sup>278</sup> Enginsoy, op cit.

<sup>279</sup> Gultekin. op cit.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid

<sup>281</sup> Wrobel, op cit.

Business Council stated; “Politicians are coming and going and the business people remain. The tensions between the two countries are not tensions between the people.”<sup>282</sup> TÜSİAD has similarly advocated for business level relations, encouraging integration and business cooperation, citing Israel as a priority investment partner.<sup>283</sup>

Numerous statements such as these are indicative of the growing role and confidence of non-governmental organizations to integrate into and use their economic leverage over state-level foreign relations, most obvious in Israel during this time due to the diplomatic ice age which commenced in 2010. Nevertheless, according to TEPAV, such joint ventures and economic projects are coordination with governmental goals of promoting the visibility and role of Turkey, both regionally and internationally.<sup>284</sup> Consequently, despite the freeze on diplomatic relations, TOBBs semi-official status and alignment not only with Davutoğlu’s specific foreign-policy objectives, but also with more general trends in foreign-policy activism under the AKP means there must be a level of governmental encouragement for the expansion of economic relations with Israel. TOBBs activities, and more broadly, pressure from the business community such as TÜSİAD to normalize diplomatic ties stands out in the case of Israel due to the rapid and extensive closure of normal channels of dialogue and diplomacy. Yet given the intense societal pressure on the AKP following the Mavi Marmara incident, it is likely that business associations were instrumental to the government at a time when for political reasons, their hand was forced. Essentially TOBB and their kin can be described as tools in Turkey’s efforts to redefine the outlook and scope of Turkey’s foreign relations.<sup>285</sup> What is clear from analysing TOBBs relations with Israel, as well as the business community’s more generally, is that the extent of societal-level networks was sufficient to sustain Turkish-Israeli relations when political will was not. Despite virulent rhetoric on both sides, economic relations did not suffer aside from in the tourism industry, and diplomatic relations were resumed once it was publicly acceptable to do so. The fact that economic relations endured and diplomacy eventually recommenced shows that although the spill-over thesis cannot be applied unequivocally, there is still supporting evidence in all three of these case studies, including Israel.

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<sup>282</sup> Jones, op cit.

<sup>283</sup> Yinanc, op cit.

<sup>284</sup> N. Kaptanoğlu, Barış için sanayi girişimi. (The industry for peace initiative) Ankara: TEPAV Briefing Note, 6 December 2005.

<sup>285</sup> Murat Yetkin, “Krizi bol bir İsrail gezisi” (The crisis peaks in Israel), *Radikal*, 11 November 2005. Accessed through: <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=169645> (03/06/2014)

#### 4. Conclusions

Turkey's foreign relations with the Middle East have undoubtedly undergone rapid and widespread transformations under the AKP. This chapter has shown that behind the rise of the AKP, with its newly economic and culturally orientated foreign-policy vision of integration and regional stability, was the emergence of business actors as a channel, and at some points, a driving force for regional foreign and economic policy change. The aim of this study was not to provide civil-society as the only or even the primary variable influencing this change, but rather one of many interconnected and oft mutually-constitutive factors which have shaped and transformed foreign-policy within a network of institutional mechanisms and within a certain social and political order. The reason why business associations have been explored at such length here is that they were central in creating the socio-political conditions necessary for civil-society impact, as detailed in the introduction to this chapter: reframing foreign relations in economic rather than security terms and opening new channels for civil-society dialogue and foreign-policy activism. As this chapter has illustrated using the case studies of Israel, Syria and northern Iraq, business associations emerged as an important, if supplementary channel for Turkey's rapprochement with the Middle East, communicating controversial foreign-policy decisions to the public, and institutionalizing consultative mechanisms not only for economic interest groups but civil-society more broadly as will be further explored in the following chapters.

This chapter has explored the relationship between Turkish business associations, the government and the emergence of an economic and culturally orientated foreign-policy towards the Middle East. It has argued that the growth and creation of various business associations, but in particular, those close to the government ideology such as TOBB, TUSKON and MÜSİAD have helped to expand the remit and scope of foreign relations. Further, that due to this ideological affinity, this is a reciprocal relationship and as business associations have supported the government's foreign-policy choices such as rapprochement with Syria, legitimizing and disseminating this to the public, the government has also pursued policies beneficial to these associations such as visa liberalization, multi-lateral business forums and increased foreign trade. There were a number of factors cited for the AKP's close relations with TUSKON and MÜSİAD, particularly salient as relations with secular TÜSİAD have deteriorated at a rapid pace. The first and foremost being shared identity, followed by the AKP's grassroots ties with the new Anatolian bourgeoisie, geographical proximity to the Middle East and favourable electoral gains for the government. The AKP has extended new opportunities for select associations through commitment to increasing foreign trade and investment, as well as through integration in the political process through state-business international trade delegations, and through participation in business association-led forums, meetings, and workshops. Equally, business associations have established domestic and

international networks of interest groups through which they exert social, economic, political and moral influence over the state – especially clear in the arena of domestic policy but was emerging as a significant force in regional relations prior to 2013. They have almost exclusive access to the AKP's top leadership when compared to other groups, with high-level public officials attending annual conventions and discussing pertinent political and economic issues due to ideational and economic interest alignment, demonstrating one of the core arguments of this thesis regarding the necessary conditions of civil-society impact.

Business associations were found to be more influential in Turkey than they have ever before. A central factor in this drive for policy influence was to expand Turkey's international integration and markets. There are a growing set of mechanisms enabling direct consultation and communication with public officials which allows business associations, and other CSOs, to effectively lobby for their interests, as well as more generally provide technical expertise and guidance to relevant state bureaucracy. Although traditional state structures and enduring dominance was found during this research, the networks and growth of the business community was found at times to have encouraged pluralistic interest mediation. That said, pluralism is not the defining feature of Turkey's evolving state-business relations, and economic interest groups were found to be using personal (crony) relationships with public officials to increase their power which raises issues with the purported pluralistic and democratic credentials theorized for civil-society in the theoretical overview. A further problem which arose during this study is an inability to determine whether leaders in Turkey are developing participatory politics to garner consensus and improve decision-making or merely to improve image perception and collectivism. The exigencies of liberal economies mean that the government needs input regarding its foreign and economic policy-making. However, there remains problems in Turkey insofar as there are not sufficient formal mechanisms of influence through which business associations can voice their opinions and interests. State-business relations remain hierarchical and influence seems to be predicated on either agreement with, or absence from, domestic policy.

A high degree of patronage, co-option and bureaucratization as a control mechanism by the state would appear to indicate that the inclusion of non-state actors into decision-making has been sporadic and often sought as an afterthought, a legitimizing tool for already formed policy. Furthermore, arguably one of the reasons why business actors have been able to influence policy in such a profound way is that their interests, and the interests of the AKP (as a government elected upon economic development) broadly align. As such, it is difficult to determine how much influence was had when the policy preferences of the two are complementary and generally mutually beneficial. Both were found to espouse a political ideology based on the assumption that strong economic relations will contribute to the resolution of bilateral political problems, which will in turn, help build the Turkish economy

and expand Turkey's influence in the region. Those organizations that come in to conflict with the government, such as TUSKON since the beginning of the Gülen affair, are quickly stripped of their ability to enter the political field, although they have (thus far) been able to continue their autonomous international activities. Consequently, it appears that despite cultivating the persona of a government who is open to plural policy-making, the AKP is often resistant or entirely closed to precisely this. As such, the inclusion of business associations into foreign-policy is not an entirely formal or institutionalized phenomenon but rather illustrates the development of a new, hybrid structure of policy-making in which CSOs can, under the strict environmental conditions identified in the introduction of political will, interest alignment in particular, take on an active role, sometimes as a tool, sometimes as an autonomous actor in foreign relations.

The emergence of business associations as a track II method for regional diplomacy acknowledged and encouraged to be autonomous from the state is remarkable in and of itself in Turkey due to the hegemony of the military and security elites just a decade ago. Furthermore, such acts can, and have on occasion spurred the government to play catch up with formal diplomatic relations. This is seen in the Middle East and Africa best as a willingness on the behalf of business associations to take economic risks was subsequently followed by the AKP's willingness to take diplomatic ones. Business associations' contact has become an important, if supplementary interface for the construction not only economic but political ties, illustrating the core argument of this thesis, that there has been an increased, albeit conditional impact of civil-society on foreign-policy under the AKP.

A potential critique of this research is that it only captures that particular time-period, during which there was a relaxation and opening in state-market-society relations. Since 2013, there has been a massive contraction in the channels of dialogue and influence. This is understood within interest group theories insofar as unorganized or diverse interests constitute a potential threat to the state during periods of crisis, and support one of the core claims regarding the limits of influence based on conflict in the state, political will and political opening (democratization level). External transformations were found to be directly related to the potential impact of business associations. Economic development and stability under EU reform and furthered by the AKP's generally sound economic policy-making in the early 2000s meant there was a domestic environment conducive to more pluralist policy-making. The economic threats posed by the Arab Spring undermined this, showing the vulnerability of non-state groups even under the clientelist environment that organizations such as MÜSİAD and TUSKON benefitted from. Turkey suffered in economic terms due to the Arab Spring, due to a constriction in their export market. This arguably reduced the voracity of economic interests in Turkey's relations with the Middle East, and thus economic interest groups, which coupled with growing security concerns, led to a re-securitization of relations. That said,

Turkey remains heavily involved in Middle Eastern affairs, which highlights that economic interests are by no means the only driving force in TFP in contradiction of much of the political economy literature cited in the introduction.

Although external transformations and political will were determined to place severe restrictions on the policy leverage and potential of business associations, their activism and involvement in foreign affairs in the early to mid-2000s was significant and increasing, showing the potential for influence from non-state actors should the right socio-political environment exist. Their international and transnational relations with both East and West were not found to represent a re-orientation per se, but rather a renewed focus on the Middle East and Islamic world more broadly, channelled through economic interest groups and based upon underlying ideational alignment, supporting the main claims made in this thesis that what is 'new' in TFP is the actors and strategies. This activism broadly accompanied state-level initiatives, and so influence on foreign-policy decision-making specifically was marginal. However, I have argued that economic interest groups played a role in changing Turkey's foreign relations' orientation and strategies through their discourses and activities. They have sought to systematically increase their influence over foreign relations, particularly with the Middle East as a new area of opportunity, taking an overtly political stance on contentious issues such as normalization, rapprochement and conflict resolution through a variety of formal and informal channels. The mere existence of such forums of dialogue and exchange means that state-business relations were not only changing under the AKP's first two terms, but subject to increasing institutionalization. That said, and as has been argued throughout, these infant ties were vulnerable to socio-political upheaval in the democratization and civilianization processes, and changes in political will regarding a soft-power foreign-policy orientation – two of the central conditions necessary for CSO impact. As has been seen since 2013, economic ties were not sufficient to prevent state-level conflict from re-emerging and the influence of economic interest groups was not sufficiently established for them to place significant pressure on policy elites in the face of these crises, illustrating the limits and conditional influence of non-state actors being largely restrained to pre- and post-conflict situations and contingent upon, more than any other factor, political will.

## Chapter Four

### Think tanks: The Intellectual Backbone of Turkish Foreign-policy?

This chapter continues the exploration of changing tools, discourses and debates in Turkey's foreign relations with the Middle East by tracing the, in this case, largely discursive input of foreign-policy research institutes, or think tanks in reframing and reorienting TFP. It argues that following the opening in state-society relations in the 1990s and early 2000s catalysed by desecuritization and the growing political power of economic interest groups as detailed in the previous chapter, and the competitiveness that bred, these organizations sought to understand and frame Turkey's rapidly changing regional relations, and in doing so, contributed to the construction of Turkey's identity and foreign-policy outlook, strategy and tools.

The policy influence of international non-governmental organizations has come to the fore of scholarly attention regarding Turkey, and globally over the past decade. As asserted throughout this thesis, increasing economic interdependence and globalization has meant that although the state remains the dominant authority within foreign relations, it is not the only authority. That although state officials retain the right and authority to enact foreign-policy, they are increasingly assisted in this task, as demonstrated in this chapter, by experts on foreign and security issues who play an influential role in defining the shape, if not the actual policies in foreign relations. Think tanks in particular have played an important role in interpreting the economic and political changes Turkey has faced since the end of the Cold War. As such, this chapter does not seek to explore the specific beliefs or statements of individual experts, but rather the constellation of discourses produced by foreign-policy think tanks involved in Middle East policy as reflected in public, media and governmental discourses on the same. By writing and arguably constituting politics, particularly through the purportedly objective framework of academic publications, this chapter argues that think tanks have constituted the intellectual backbone of Turkey's new identity as a soft regional power or hegemon, and thus, the strategies, orientation and tools of foreign relations. By dissecting how this construction occurs, disseminates and impacts, this chapter contributes to a more holistic understanding of what is 'new' in TFP and in particular, where it came from (i.e think tanks). Exploring the generation of these foreign-policy ideas and strategies also supports the main arguments made in this thesis as to how, and who is enacting this 'new' foreign-policy (business associations, and as will be detailed in chapter five, faith-based NGOs).

Although there is a growing body of literature that explores think tanks influence over public and foreign-policy, this discussion has generally been rooted in the American experience.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> See J.Smith, *Idea brokers: Think tanks and the rise of the new policy elite*. Simon and Schuster, 1993; Andrew Rich. *Think tanks, public policy, and the politics of expertise*. Cambridge University



With the proliferation of think tanks in Turkey under the AKP, there is a growing need to understand how different cultural, institutional and political environments effect think tanks' potential policy influence. A few studies have emerged to fill this research gap, although still focusing more on interest groups such as business associations and almost exclusive focusing on public policy issues, or else EU accession.<sup>287</sup> In the Turkish case, literature on how think tanks seek influence on foreign affairs is almost non-existent, although many scholars make mention of this as an area of interest to be further explored and Aras, Toktaş and Kurt have an excellent piece of research on the specific impact of think tanks on Turkey's national security culture.<sup>288</sup> Due to a continuing lack in holistic analysis of this topic, this chapter will not only centre upon organization-specific analysis but also provide broader conceptual conclusions based on the evidence of Turkey's rapidly changing 'experience': painting a more complete picture of the rise of think tank culture in Turkey.

This chapter then seeks to examine and aid the understanding of the evolving role of Turkish foreign-policy think tanks, their relationship with policy makers and the networks/ channels through which they seek to influence and input into foreign affairs. It is organized in to three parts; section one offers a historical overview of the evolution of think tank culture in Turkey. Section two explores the influence of think tanks, both in terms of policy and discourse, through the use of two examples of independent think tanks; the Global Political Trends Center (GPoT) and the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV). Their potential and existing influence over Middle East relations will be explored by assessing their expert advice, agenda setting, communication and ideas. Section three assesses the characteristics, aims and agenda of three types of think tanks: governmental non-governmental organization (GNGO- representing and informing the interests of government at an international level), business non-governmental organization (BNGO- pursuing economic goals through diplomacy and international development) and independent non-governmental organizations (InNGO – research institutes who centre their agenda and practices upon knowledge production and seek to inform government, the public and the media about TFP ostensibly without agenda or subjectivity).

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Press, 2005; and Robert Weaver, ed. *Think tanks and civil societies: Catalysts for ideas and action*. Transaction publishers, 2002.

<sup>287</sup> See A.Karaosmanoğlu and E.Onulduran, "Foreign-policy Institute and the Genesis of Think-Tank Culture in Turkey", *Contemporary Issues in International Politics* (Ankara: Foreign-policy Institute, 2004), pp.1-4; and S. Güvenç. (2007). *Türkiye'nin Dış Politikası ve Düşünce Kuruluşları*.(Turkey's Foreign-policy and Think Tanks) in S. Cerit-Mazlum and E. Doğan, eds., *Sivil Toplum Örgütleri ve Dış Politika: Yeni Sorunlar, Yeni Aktörler*.(Civil-society Organisations and Foreign-policy: New Questions and New Actors) İstanbul: Bağlam Yayınları,

<sup>288</sup> B.Aras, Ş.Toktaş and Ü.Kurt (2010). *Araştırma Merkezlerinin Yükselişi: Türkiye'de Dış Politika ve Ulusal Güvenlik Kültürü* (The Rise of Research Centers: Foreign-policy and National Security Culture in Turkey). Ankara: SETA Publications.

It is argued that through think tanks' increased research on the Middle East in the 1990s and 2000s, they contributed to (re)presenting the region through the lens of opportunity rather than threat, providing a new intellectual framework for regional policy-making. This framing of foreign relations became dominant under the first two terms of AKP rule, underlying the government's hegemonic discourse and centralized decision-making. The strength of Turkish think tanks then was not in producing new ideas or challenging state power, but in their intellectual contribution to building Turkey's image as a model democracy and regional soft-power. These two core discourses of Turkish foreign-policy will be discussed throughout in that they were (re)produced, legitimized and disseminated in part by think tanks. Think tanks' emphasis on intellectual contribution to policy debates means that evidence of direct policy influence was found to be negligible: however, in contributing to normative policy debates, it appears there is influence nonetheless. It is argued here that through the production of research and policy advice, Turkish think tanks not only described Turkey's changing relations and identity within the Middle East, but actually contributed to the construction of it for a time. This chapter concludes by assessing the limits and potential influence of think tanks on Turkish foreign affairs. It will reveal that when it comes to 'high politics', direct influence is minimal, however there are clear and common examples of consultation, ideas, agenda setting and expert advice which have filtered into Turkey's foreign relations more broadly. That said, key issues regarding think tanks as a tool of elites and questions of independence were raised throughout, and as such, this thesis assesses their influence critically with reference to the central conditions of impact identified throughout: political will, relations with the government, interest alignment and autonomy.

## **1. The Evolution of Think Tank Culture**

The bipartisan context of the Turkish political system upon the AKP's rise to power and the party's initial need to attain intellectual ammunition to combat the previously dominant Kemalist security-centric paradigm presented an opportune opening for think tanks to become involved in foreign-policy. Public opinion, the media and accountability became a more important aspect of foreign-policy decision-making under the democratization measures adopted in the early 2000s which further fuelled this as a growth industry and source of expert knowledge. This section will assess the evolution of Turkish think tanks in historical context, as much of the genesis of think tanks' role in foreign-policy was laid prior to the rise of the AKP, focussing on the transition from a securitized perspective to one based on soft-power and upon representing Turkey as a model democracy.

There were a number of social and economic think tanks established following the 1960 coup, constitutional reform and the widespread upheaval that followed. Many had direct links to

Turkey's private sector such as the Economic and Social Studies Conference, established in 1961 by prominent businessman Nejat Eczacıbaşı. Organizations such as these came into being due to the growing power of the business sector and to the limited political liberalization measures adopted in the post-coup constitution. Although these organizations played no role in foreign-policy, they laid the groundwork for the evolution of think tank culture in Turkey, and were pioneering institutions, however with a limited pro-government and pro-western remit.<sup>289</sup> The other most prominent organization of this era was the Foundation for Economic Development (IKV- a business initiative funded by a variety of chambers of commerce and industry and established in 1965. In scope and objective, these institutions were primarily aimed at Turkey's participation in the European Economic Community (EEC) and at furthering economic development in relation to liberalization. These organizations, and others established in the 1970s were largely consensus-seeking, privately funded and western focussed and often enjoyed the support of the foreign ministry.<sup>290</sup>

Turkey's first foreign-policy think tank was established in 1974, the Foreign-policy Institute. During the Cold War, this institute as well as a number of Turkish intellectuals produced a significant body of research positioning Turkey in the West and reifying its western identity as well as its NATO membership and security policy.<sup>291</sup> This tradition endures today as a survey of scholarship on TFP shows that the majority of Turkey's western-educated intellectual elite focus on foreign and security policy from this perspective. This institute's journal, *Foreign-policy*, is exemplary of this status quo consensus and remains one of Turkey's foremost journals, contributed to by ministers of foreign affairs, diplomats and military officials, as well as experts. During the Cold War, the journal and associated think tank was arguably at the forefront of Turkey's intellectual production of the Middle East as a threat, entrenching Turkey's western military-centred security policies. Later, as the environmental context began to change, the Foreign-policy Institute followed Özal's Middle East policy to the letter, becoming a staunch advocate of Turkish military intervention against Saddam Hussein for example, with experts giving speeches and releasing publications advocating for Turkey to adopt the US policy on this issue: later, advocating that the AKP continue Özal's policy and 'act with the United States'.<sup>292</sup> Despite efforts to contribute to the formation of TFP through research and public information, Seyfi Tashan, founder of the Foreign-policy

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<sup>289</sup> Nejat Eczacıbaşı was a student in the US, Can Dünder. *Bir Yasam Iksiri: Nejat F. Eczacıbaşı*, (An Injection of Vitality: Nejat F.Eczacıbaşı) (Istanbul: Türkiye's Bankası Kültür Yayınları) 2003, p.99.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> For examples of how intellectual writings from academics, journalists and various state and non-state actors contribute to state identity, see Gearóid Tuathail and John Agnew, "Geopolitics and discourse: Practical geopolitical reasoning in American foreign-policy," *Political Geography* 11: 2 (1992): 190-204; and Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979).

<sup>292</sup> H.Bagci, 'Are Saddam Hussein's days numbered?' *Turkish Daily News*, Foreign-policy Institute (February 11, 2002) Accessed through: <http://foreignpolicy.org.tr/are-saddam-husseins-days-numbered-prof-dr-huseyin-bagci-11-february-2002-turkish-daily-news/> (16/11/16)

Institute admits that during this era, “foreign-policy was a matter of the Foreign Ministry, not seen from outside of foreign-policy affairs.”<sup>293</sup>

Due to the embedded supremacy of the military and civilian bureaucracy prior to the leadership of Turgut Özal, think tanks operating during this time were largely tools of elites, used to communicate Turkey’s foreign-policy consensus to domestic and international audiences. Think tanks were also tasked with an informative role: serving as a public information tool on issues the state considered to be of public interest such as Cyprus and Armenia. Because of their instrumental and non-oppositional character, think tanks of this era were not actively repressed, however they were not encouraged and there were few attempts by either the Foreign Ministry or the General Staff to utilize or experiment with think tank culture.<sup>294</sup> However, following the end of the Cold War and democratization across the Eastern Europe and Turkey, there was a new wave in think tanks mobilized by the challenges and opportunities of this new world order.<sup>295</sup> Growing relations between the EU and Turkey and the customs union additionally stimulated an environment in which think tanks could provide input on discussions of foreign and security policy. Özal’s discursive commitment to democratization, especially the education and training needed to stabilize Turkey’s market economy, coupled with the EU accession process all factored in to the proliferation of think tanks in the 1990s. There was a political opening for this kind of input under Özal thanks to his economic reforms, for national-level think tanks such as the Association for Liberal Thinking, established in 1992, to research and influence on market-oriented policy. Several think tanks were established following these openings, most notable were government sponsored ones such as the ARI Group under the Motherland Party in 1994 and the Centre for Strategic Research (SAM), under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1995, showing the rising interest in foreign-policy think tanks in this era, political liberalization and the strengthening of civil-society. Following which, there was a slow pluralization of the policy issues, growing from predominantly security-focused institutes to regional democracy promotion, conflict resolution and international development.

As discussed in chapter three; behind Turkey’s economic and cultural expansion into the former Soviet Bloc and the EU is large body of research and political agents such as academics, experts, specialized press, diplomats, corporations and trade representatives guiding and

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<sup>293</sup> “Foreign-policy Institute and the Genesis of Think-Tank Culture in Turkey”. *Contemporary Issues in International Politics: Essay in Honour of Seyfi Tashan*. Ankara: Foreign-policy Institute, 2004, p.2.

<sup>294</sup> S.Güvenç. (2009). *Seeking Influence in Foreign-policy-Making: Turkey’s Experiment with Think-Tanks*. In conference paper presented at the 21st IPSA World Congress of Political Science (Vol. 6, pp. 245-264). p. 6.

<sup>295</sup> See S.Ilhan. (2005), *Türklerin Jeopolitiği ve Avrasyacılık*, (Turks Geopolitics and Eurasianism). Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi., p.11; and Güvenç, op cit.

lobbying for this.<sup>296</sup> For example, the Economic Development Foundation (IKV) played a central role in lobbying for Turkey's inclusion in the Schengen agreement, both nationally and within the EU.<sup>297</sup> Although the ethos of most of these organizations was still security-centric, developments in both international affairs and within the study of international relations following the end of the Cold War led to an expansion and increase in experience and familiarity with wider issues within the policy community; such as economics, globalization, the environment and conflict resolution. Changes within Turkey's foreign-policy environment, particularly related to the impact of the first Gulf War created new challenges for the state and opportunities for analysts, facilitating the growth and development of Turkish think tank culture in the early 2000s. But it is with the context of two main systemic changes; (i) economic liberalization, and (ii) EU accession and political liberalization, that the proliferation of think tanks will be explored.

Economic liberalization and a growing need within the government for specialized advice and research capacity in the 1990s is directly related to the later proliferation of research institutes and the wide expansion of their scope under the AKP. As is argued throughout this thesis, civil-society actors – here think tanks specifically – were needed to provide the intellectual framework for, and justification of, Turkey's handling of new foreign-policy activism. They arguably still represented a tool to political elites, used by the AKP to legitimize growing ties with the Middle East which many analysts perceived at that time as indicative both of the AKP's hidden Islamic agenda, and as a sign of Turkey 'turning its back on the West.' This explains the growth of Middle East focused think tanks, needed to challenge the pervasive Western-centric analyses disseminated by Turkey's older security think tanks. Diplomats and businessmen seemingly saw an opportunity in this need and the early 2000s saw the emergence of multiple think tanks dealing with, and largely supportive of, Turkey's growing economic (and later, political) involvement in the Middle East. Largely liberal in terms of their methodological and normative outlook, such institutes produced recommendations that would further Turkey's entrance into open world markets; particularly in Eastern Europe and to a lesser degree, the Middle East.<sup>298</sup>

Not only economic liberalization following the end of the Cold War, but political liberalization, had an impact on Turkey's think tank culture and focus. While there are ongoing debates over the relationship between democratization and think tanks, domestic reform in line

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<sup>296</sup> See Z.Öniş. "Domestic politics, international norms and challenges to the state: Turkey-EU relations in the post-Helsinki Era." *Turkish Studies* 4, no. 1 (2003): 9-34; N.Canefe, and M.Ugur, eds. *Turkey and European integration: Accession prospects and issues*. Routledge, 2004; and Kemal Kirişçi, and Neslihan Kaptanoğlu. "The politics of trade and Turkish foreign-policy." *Middle Eastern Studies* 47, no. 5 (2011): 705-724.

<sup>297</sup> Kirişçi and Kaptanoğlu, op cit., pp.705-724.

<sup>298</sup> Güvenç, op cit.

with the EU accession process, particularly, freedom of expression and association in the case of Turkey, was certainly an enabling factor.<sup>299</sup> In particular, new media freedoms, freedom of associations and civil-society involvement in the formation of a new constitution, as well as the democratization process, led to the increased expectation of societal participation.<sup>300</sup> There was a pervasive democratic ethos articulated in the mission and agendas of think tanks established in this period. Like those in the US and Britain, and potentially more so due to their geopolitical and civilizational links with the Middle East, many Turkish think tanks perceive themselves as regional and even global democracy promoters and this ethos can potentially be viewed as the *raison d'être* for many of them.<sup>301</sup> Think tanks established in this era, in contrast to the rationalist/ realist security studies institutes of the Cold War, share an idealistic character and are heavily engaged in dialogue and debate as tools of conflict resolution and peace-building. This ideal was amplified during the early years of AKP rule as the 'Turkish model' became a prominent term used in policy circles and the media. This discourse first arose in the 1990 and was propounded by Bülent Ecevit amongst others, however due to political and economic instability, it lacked credibility.<sup>302</sup> This may explain why the AKP have invested financially and discursively in CSOs as democratic institutions, as they were in many ways contributing to the intended image of Turkey as 'the only democracy in the Middle East', strengthening Turkey's nation brand and providing policy elites with a tool for hearts and minds campaigning on key foreign-policy issues.

The AKP's hearts and minds campaign in changing the parameters and focus of TFP, and the position of Davutoğlu in the foreign ministry as an academic with strong ties to individuals working in think tanks, and to intellectuals more broadly, strengthened the role of think tanks in foreign relations.<sup>303</sup> Public consultations increased and were institutionalized under the AKP.<sup>304</sup> The proliferation of foreign-policy think tanks since the early 2000s and their increasing connection with public offices such as the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Foreign Trade, the Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency and even the National Intelligence Organization and the Turkish Armed Forces, although not totally unique to the AKP era, is certainly unique in size and scope. There are several reasons for this proliferation, some have been discussed in detail above but more broadly, constitutional changes and governmental reform, the attitudes of key political leaders and a new openness of policy-makers to engage

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<sup>299</sup> Interview with Gencer Ozcan of GPoT, Istanbul, 26 March, 2015.

<sup>300</sup> Interview with Mehmet Yegin of USAK, Ankara, 16 October, 2015.

<sup>301</sup> Interview findings indicated a strong trend towards democracy promotion and such activities are at the core of many of the think tanks interviewed.

<sup>302</sup> B.Ecevit (1999). "An Address by the Turkish Prime Minister," 28 September 1999, Transcript of lecture by Bülent Ecevit at the Washington Institute, Accessed through: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/an-address-by-the-turkish-prime-minister-full-transcript>. (30/07/2015)

<sup>303</sup> Interview, Akgun, op cit.

<sup>304</sup> Interviews Yegin op cit, and Ozcan, op cit.

with civil-society. The consequences of the emergence of think tanks, and their efforts and strategies in influencing foreign relations will now be explored.

## **2. Think Tanks: Influence and Strategy**

The proliferation and diversification of Turkey's think tank culture in the early to mid-2000s was intensive. Interestingly, there appeared to be an emerging consensus, arguably based on the US experience, of think tanks as the most legitimate channel through which a range of non-state actors, particularly businessmen, diplomats and ex-military officials, could seek influence.<sup>305</sup> Consolidation of think tanks strategy, agenda and funding based on greater experience and institutionalization in the 2000s and policy lobbying social and economic fields led to the expansion of think tanks' international agendas. They present a face of 'objective research', and independence; operating as a bridge between academia and policy.<sup>306</sup> Although their objectivity should be rigorously scrutinized, as arguably no such thing exists within any organization seeking policy influence, and think tanks are no exception with divides along ideological, partisan and theoretical fault lines, the majority of institutions are relatively autonomous from the government and under the right circumstances (liberal democracy rather than authoritarian environments), have the potential to further pluralism in the decision-making process.

According to Richard Haas, Director of Policy and Planning at the US state department, there are five principle benefits of working with think tanks. Although he offered this definition related to the US, I believe the same framework can be applied in this case if modified slightly due to the modelling of Turkey's fledgling think tank culture on the US experience. Ideally: (i) they generate new ideas or 'new thinking' among policy makers, (ii) their experts can serve in government offices, (iii) they offer a shared platform for dialogue and understanding of policy options, (iv) they educate the public and (v) they can act as a third-party mediator. While direct influence on policy is negligible, Higgott and Stone have argued that evidence of influence should not be restrained to policy; that think tanks perform a legitimizing role and lend credibility to decision-makers.<sup>307</sup> The 'politics of credibility' is perhaps the most important factor here. According to elite theories, think tanks are not apolitical nor do they enhance democratic standards necessarily. Think tanks can, rather than serving as a public

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<sup>305</sup> Conclusions drawn from participant observation in Ankara and Istanbul, 2013. Relation to the US experience was raised by multiple staff from USAK, TESEV and IPC, and is arguably rooted in their western-education and the global modelling of think tanks on their older and more institutionalized US equivalents.

<sup>306</sup> The majority of think tanks assessed and interviewed referenced themselves as a 'bridge' between research and policy making.

<sup>307</sup> R.Higgott, and D.Stone. "The limits of influence: foreign-policy think tanks in Britain and the USA." *Review of International Studies* 20, no. 01 (1994): 15-34.

information tool, serve as a means to reach consensus between various policy elites from politics, military and business communities. In this regard, they operate as a legitimizing tool and in some circumstances, a spokesperson for various interest groups. As such, these principles laid out above are only the ideal and as will be argued throughout this chapter, think tanks often fail in one of their foremost tasks; in generating new ideas.

Thus, think tanks' involvement in policy-making is not an apolitical or interest-free process, and the agenda of think tanks is shaped and in some circumstances dictated by a variety of governmental, military and international actors, as will be discussed in the following sections. The subtle and more intangible influence these interests have on policy are harder to trace than the political bargaining economic interest groups pursue for example. It is through intellectual arguments and analysis rather than lobbying that think tanks have access to policy communities. However, the closed nature of foreign-policy decision-making as well as the numerous mediating factors act to shroud any cause effect relationship that could be identified. As such, rather than attempting to measure impact, this section and the thesis more broadly is concerned with exploring what their policy related activities are and how they conduct them. This section will address the variety of methods and strategies used by 'independent' think tanks as ostensibly the most objective and interest-free organizations, drawing on examples the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) and the Global Political Trends Center (GPoT). The subsections will explore think tanks' ideal role as civilian experts, their agenda setting, communication, informative role and ideas to influence before critically discussing their actual function in influencing foreign relations.

## **2.1 Civilian experts**

Think tanks have emerged as a key source for expert advice for both the media and government over the past few decades. They play a growing advisory role and are commissioned or even contracted by state institutions to pursue research projects on public and foreign-policy issues. Examples such as IPCs Civilian Capacity network as well as TEPAVs mediation between Afghanistan and Pakistan are demonstrative of this and will be discussed in more detail in section three. However, government contracts for foreign-policy research or examples of direct policy influence are still a rarity. Conferences, media and public debates are the main channels through which think tanks channel their expert advice. Scholarly studies, policy recommendations as well as journalistic reports are produced and disseminated following these public debates, reaching out to the public sphere and increasing public and political consciousness about foreign-policy issues and transformations.<sup>308</sup> None of this can be directly

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<sup>308</sup> USAK, SETA, IPC, TEPAV websites



related in terms of influence to government policy, however it is argued here that these debates constitute the intellectual background decision-makers operate in.

They are generally most involved at the level of expert advice in policy planning. These institutions bring together important elites from business, government, academia and media formally as a method to both debate, and seek consensus. Proposals are then disseminated to the policy-making elite.<sup>309</sup> Turkish think tanks compile policy recommendations on pertinent foreign-policy issues, dependent on their agenda. While this in no way challenges the government's authority over decision-making, it can provide intellectual legitimacy for existing policies, offer a communicative tool or else provide the research needed to form a policy line. Erhan Doğan, an expert in civil-society and foreign-policy, was critical of this relationship however. He discussed the agenda of certain as being parallel to that of the government, arguing that the elite from certain organizations have internalized the ideas of the party yet have their own agenda: simply inserting themselves into the process to push the foreign ministry in the direction they want.<sup>310</sup> This raises an important issue of dominant CSOs monopolizing the limited opening available for non-state influence.<sup>311</sup> As such, think tanks can be seen to represent a new elite and are not necessarily furthering democratic decision-making, representative of public interests or furthering public engagement in their advisory capacity. This is particularly applicable for GNGOs due to their 'insider status'.

GNGOs offer expert advice as with any other think tank, however analysis of their publications and statements indicated that this advice is largely restrained to propagated existing ideas in Turkey's foreign-policy style, publicizing the idea of reconciliation and rapprochement with the Muslim world. This calls into question the actual advisory capacity of these organizations and is indicative of the aforementioned point that think tanks serve as a legitimizing tool. BNGOs and InNGOs advised multilateral relations and recommending renewed ties with the EU and the US, however this too was a common discourse and practice of the government. Regardless, the drive here was not to serve as a tool but rather due to concerns that the AKP's multilateralism was temporary whilst Middle East relations strengthened, explaining why think tanks reports entrenching this at an intellectual level and in public debate proliferated during this period.<sup>312</sup> Given InNGOs tenuous position as 'independent' and their lack of financial stability, these organizations remain reluctant to overtly criticize government policy and tend to advise policy makers on relatively non-contentious issues or topics which broadly fall in line with the AKP's agenda. GPoT and the Marmara Foundation for example are engaged in peace-building and conflict resolution in the Middle East, cultural and interfaith

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<sup>309</sup> W.Domhoff, 2002. *Who Rules America: Power & Politics*, 7th Edition. McGraw Hill: New York.

<sup>310</sup> Interview with Erhan Dogan, Marmara University, 16 February, 2015.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

<sup>312</sup> IPC, TUSIAD Foreign-policy Forum, TEPAV and TESEV have all produced extensive research proposing multilateral relations.

dialogue, as well as improving Turkey's regional relations more broadly. Although all the think tanks explored in this chapter in fact show strong similarities with government policy, I argue there is a mutual influence here and that the government's early (and limited) foray into commissioning expert advice shaped both their discursive and practical approach to the Middle East. Themes of rapprochement, dialogue, engagement, economic integration and public debate were found both in the think tanks' policy recommendations and the AKP's actual relations with the Middle East.

USAK specialist and expert on civil-society and foreign-policy Mehmet Yegin claimed that the period of 2005 to 2010 was the height of governmental demand for expert advice from think tanks; "That was the era they were really pushing for information. It was an opening."<sup>313</sup> He argued that a public and political need to understand developments in the Middle East converged with the declining influence of the military over politics which led to an opening for input from think tanks' experts, an argument underpinning much of this thesis.<sup>314</sup> According to Yegin, Davutoğlu was asking for representatives from think tanks, informing think tanks of what was going on and explaining and transferring first-hand information about the AKP's Middle East policy. He was apparently also open to criticism and think tanks were told to question and criticize governmental policy. This appears to be the golden era in civil-society-state relations and there were several instances of direct input from think tanks' on foreign-policy issues, such as GPoT and Cyprus, IPC's Civilian Capacity Network and USAK's work on the Kurdish conflict, which interlinks with northern Iraqi policy, all of which will be detailed in section three.<sup>315</sup> The government called on think tank experts for advice much more on internal policy issues such as energy and security however, but foreign-policy was beginning to be an area for consultancy during this era.<sup>316</sup> Although interviewees have embedded interests in presenting a positive view of their influence and relations with the state, the consistent referral to the first two terms of AKP rule and acknowledgement that this 'opening' was now closed lends credence to these statements.

Academics involved in Turkish foreign-policy have increasingly focussed on the growing role of civilian experts under the AKP. Kanat described this as 'one of the central features in today's Turkish foreign-policy.'<sup>317</sup> Given the evidence of influence found so far, I argue this claim is exaggerated, however the contrast between the old statist monopolization and closed-door policy-making indicates that this remains a significant change, regardless of its limited nature. Furthermore, as this statement was published in SETAs journal, *Insight Turkey*, it is

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<sup>313</sup> Interview Yegin, op cit.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid

<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

<sup>317</sup> K.Kanat, "AK Party's Foreign-policy: Is Turkey Turning Away from the West?" *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 12, No.1, pp. 205-225 (2010) p.216.

also indicative of the government's wish to be perceived as open to civil-society input on foreign-policy issues. Kanat further argues that the AKP made use of the 'intellectual capital' found in academia and think tanks by providing them access to decision-making elites. This 'access' has certainly been the case, however it is arguable that rather than 'providing access', by promoting the image of the AKP as a party open to non-state input, the government instead created the opportunity for influence which various experts then capitalized on. Thus, who is capitalizing upon who requires problematizing here; there appears to be a mutual and self-interested relationship where the government wishes to be perceived as open and democratic, and experts wish to contribute and influence policy.

## **2.2 Informing**

Although instances of expert advice directly guiding government foreign-policy were found to be negligible, think tanks' role in informing broader debates and forming the intellectual background upon which policy is made is much more significant. Although there are multiple sources of information (the media, academia, consultants and international agencies), it appears that in Turkey, and more generally, think tanks are the favourite. This may be because of their specialization and expert service but more likely, due to their practices as highly modern institutions. Think tanks are geared to providing information and policy-focussed systematic and accessible analysis. Moreover, they are extremely active in disseminating this analysis and advice to policy makers, as well as to the public and media. Although relatively new to the game in Turkey, foreign-policy think tanks have emerged and shown themselves publicly to be a relevant and relatively objective source of information on international affairs. Policy makers are logically most open to input from non-state actors when needing technical/practical information in deciphering complex political options they have little or no knowledge of. This is when think tanks should and do play a role, sourcing information in a timely and opportune fashion.

TEPAV for example has indicated that their involvement in Afghani-Pakistani peace negotiations was at the behest of the government.<sup>318</sup> Since this time, they have provided summaries of developments to the government, which has increasingly acted as a mediator between these two states. USAK representative Mehmet Yegin told of being commissioned for government research projects, as well as of their analyst magazine being suggested reading for new diplomatic candidates as examples of the role and influence of civil-society actors' informational services.<sup>319</sup> Yegin claimed that the research output of think tanks is collected by government advisors and presented to officials and relevant MPs. Think tanks almost always provide this as a service to policy makers. GPoT for example holds annual panels on 'The

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<sup>318</sup> Interview Çağlar, op cit.

<sup>319</sup> Interview Yegin op cit.

Recent Developments in the Middle East, North Africa and the Role of Turkey'. The ideas and advice from round-table meetings are then compiled and presented to government officials and the media as a series of "Policy Talks."<sup>320</sup> The actual impact of such reports is negligible however the body of research produced and connections forged during such meetings, with attendance from ex-ambassadors, state officials and international civil-society representatives, are noteworthy and present GPoT as a kind of public diplomat despite it being an InNGO.

Think tanks play a parallel but equally important role in informing the public. Numerous studies have emerged over the past decade indicating that Turkey's decision-makers are increasingly attentive to public opinion.<sup>321</sup> Field work consistently revealed a similar view (with a notable secession of this following Gezi Park).<sup>322</sup> Mehmet Yegin asserted that "They [the AKP] do not want to be out of context. They wanted to engage with the debates around... They are attentive."<sup>323</sup> This view has been echoed throughout Turkish academia, and there was clearly a strong belief that following the civilianization of foreign-policy, public opinion became a more significant factor in decision-making. The reasons for the AKP's relative openness to public opinion were discussed in chapter three in the context of business and electoral needs, however there is another factor. The AKP developing a more 'active' and visible foreign-policy and increasing need for public legitimacy meant that public opinion rose in importance. This is linked to think tanks as an important source of information for publics.

Based on research conducted for this chapter, as well as the conclusions drawn by Toktaş and Kurt on the rise of think tanks in Turkey's foreign and security culture, I argue that this is a direct indicator of think tanks' growing influence in terms of shaping public opinion, and by extension, foreign relations if we are to support the previous supposition that public opinion matters.<sup>324</sup> As argued in chapter three, multiple journalists and academics have attributed Turkey's 2003 Iraq decision to public opinion. Think tanks' intellectuals were involved in catalysing and mobilizing the public debate surrounding Turkey's policy towards Iraq and the US. Iraq was not viewed from one perspective however, with key old-guard think tanks such as the Foreign-policy Institute advocating that Turkey pursue a US-allied policy line. Thus, while no direct policy influence for think tanks was identified, the role they played in informing public debate, in providing expert opinions in the media, created the environmental context upon which policy was formed.

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<sup>320</sup> M.Akgün et al. *Orta Doğu ve Kuzey Afrika'daki Değişimi Anlamak*. (Understanding Change in the Middle East and Africa). Global Political Trends Center, Istanbul. No. 1, 2011.

<sup>321</sup> Aras, Toktaş and Kurt, op cit.

<sup>322</sup> As has been discussed in chapter one, Gezi Park's impact on civil-society caused the reversal of many of the progressive trends discussed in this thesis. That said, the limited time-frame since these events occurred means that further analysis is required to determine whether this is a permanent or temporary shift which was further exacerbated by the Arab Spring.

<sup>323</sup> Interview Yegin, op cit.

<sup>324</sup> Toktas, and Aras, op cit.

Think tanks' activities in informing the public and engaging in public debate is indicative in and of itself that the government is attentive to public opinion. Similar studies in China showed that think tanks do not engage widely with the public because the elite context of the policy-making environment makes it unnecessary.<sup>325</sup> The Turkish public appear exceptionally well informed on matters of regional foreign relations. This can be seen in the data from public surveys such as TESEVs on Turkish public opinion trends towards the Middle East. Arguably, think tanks' reports and polling are in fact formative of this public opinion due to their strong media presence.<sup>326</sup> Mensur Akgun, ex-president of TESEV and current director of GPoT supported this assertion, additionally arguing that research by think tanks, easily facilitated and disseminated by the media in the age of communications, created a social awareness of Turkey's foreign-policy: encouraged the public to take part of the Middle East debate and contributing to the building of better relations.<sup>327</sup> USAK went further in asserting that this has a direct link to policy-making: "one of the interesting qualities of the ruling party is that they're very focussed on public opinion and how it is shaped. They are sensitive to the debates on the ground and one way or another, feel they need to respond, whether positive or negative."<sup>328</sup> The negative response has been abundantly clear in the authoritarian environment consolidated since 2013 with crackdowns on public services and speech regarding contentious foreign-policy choices in Syria, however the positive responses are less clear due to the myriad of other factors influencing foreign-policy choices.

Turkish think tanks not only play a role in informing the public of policy decisions and informing the government of public opinion domestically: they also play a role in influencing public opinion trends abroad. Publicizing Turkey as a soft-power, promoting dialogue and economic integration through conferences, workshops and the media has impacted upon Turkey's image abroad, which in turn provided the opportunities and political environment for Turkey's attempts to establish itself as a regional interlocker. Think tanks' promotion of the image of Turkey as a mediator, through transnational civil-society networks which will be discussed in the following section on communication, contributed to a positive reception abroad. Having initially been endowed with a limited and purely informational role in Turkish politics, the more established think tank culture has become, the greater role they have sought to play. Since historically and currently, universities and business have stayed away from policy debates, think tanks seemingly define the landscape of public debate on foreign-policy issues in Turkey. Their reports, policy recommendations, and consultancy work for both media

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<sup>325</sup> C.Li., 2017. *The Power of Ideas: The Rising Influence of Thinkers and Think Tanks in China*. World Scientific.

<sup>326</sup> Akgun et al, 2011, op cit.

<sup>327</sup> Interview Akgun, op cit.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

and government puts them in a unique position to inform the public, the government and other nongovernmental actors both at home and abroad.

### 2.3 Agenda setting

There is an abundance of research citing media focus as one of the main factors determining the public agenda.<sup>329</sup> The government obviously holds a definitive role here, however regardless of their power, the media is a necessary channel of communication and agenda setting. How that agenda is shaped- including the sources for mass media and government such as think tanks' reports and activities needs addressing however. How think tanks' own agenda is set also requires thought and is reflective of the complex and interdependent interests of the political elite and civil-society elite. The research agenda of think tanks is often set by the board of directors, which for think tanks usually consists of a variety of ex-politicians and military officials, diplomats and businessmen, illustrating the circular nature of agenda setting between and among these groups.

It is clear from the previous sections that the main medium through which think tanks communicate with both the state and the public is the media. The Turkish media seem to have strong connections with these institutions and regularly use their expert advice. They also have numerous articles promoting the agenda and activities of think tanks, such as *Zaman's* coverage of the Marmara Foundation's Eurasian economic summits and *Hürriyet's* reporting on TESEV. Furthermore, almost all think tank experts write op-eds and make regular media appearances. This high level of media visibility is an important reflection of the methods by which think tanks enter the policy-making process through public debate and shaping the agenda. Media visibility is also used by scholars as an indicator of influence and a method to measure impact on government policy, however there is little attention given to who decides what is newsworthy and where media content comes from.<sup>330</sup> The independent activities of think tank experts working as columnists for various Turkish and international news outlets is an important source of news content, and an example of agenda setting and influence. As with mass media, think tanks may not be effective in telling people what to think, but they are able to play a role in telling people what to think about.<sup>331</sup>

The tone, agenda and style of a particular think tank is discernible in many ways, the clearest of which however is recognizable in their publications. All Turkish think tanks produce a

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<sup>329</sup> M.Carl, Think Tank Agenda Setting: The Influence of the Council on Foreign Relations on Elections, the New Administration's Transition Agenda, and Beyond. A Case Study. No. CADRE/PC-2005-021, 2005. Accessed through: <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a477263.pdf> (11/07/2015)

<sup>330</sup> D.Abelson, *Do Think Tanks Matter? Assessing the Impact of Public Policy Institutes*. Second Edition. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009.

<sup>331</sup> D.Abelson, Think Tanks and U.S. Foreign-policy: An Historical View (U.S. Foreign-policy Agenda, 2002), p.73.

journal of sorts and strong themes can be detected throughout their research indicating their policy principles. The strongest and most relevant identified themes for USAK, SETA, GPoT, TESEV and IPC are conflict resolution, mediation, EU accession, diplomatic and economic integration with MENA and peace-building; with USAK and SETA exhibiting strong leanings towards the Middle East which is indicative of the government's agenda as they are GNGOs. The Marmara Foundation, TEPAV and TÜSIAD Foreign-policy Forum have a stronger focus on economic integration and Eurasian partnerships which is in line with their characteristics and agendas as economic-orientated institutions. All these themes can also be identified in public and governmental discourse and it was stated in interviews that the AKP is attentive to, and sometimes assimilates, the activities/ agenda of think tanks. It is this convergence of media attention, information and expert advice discussed in the previous two sections that sets the agenda; with think tank experts feeding the media, analysing political events and framing issues and the media acting as a conduit for think tanks' agenda. The main criticism levelled at this kind of media engagement as a strategy to gain influence is that think tanks are becoming more engaged in journalism than actual scientific research, which undermines their ostensive aims at objectivity and independent research.<sup>332</sup>

TESEV's public opinion surveys are a good example of agenda setting and also, of un-official public diplomacy. TESEV has a strong regional focus on the Middle East.<sup>333</sup> The foreign-policy topics they propose to the public through media dissemination may well already have been on the agenda, but were arguably sustained as topics for public debate by TESEV's research, and similar ones by GPoT. Cyprus, Armenia, nuclear Iran, the Turkish model and Israeli normalization were just some of the topics covered. TESEV have arguably contributed to the growing sense of the importance of public opinion by publishing number public opinion surveys on foreign-policy issues. This data is presented objectively but there are clear normative undertones which are indicative of TESEV's attempts to shape the foreign-policy agenda of the government by communicating the public's agenda. Relations with Israel are questioned and TESEV remarks that it is surprising that anti-Israel sentiment is not higher than 40 percent.<sup>334</sup> The study is also clearly supportive of Turkey-US relations to a lesser degree, pro-EU integration. Above all, TESEV's research communicates a public position that is supportive of Turkey's mediation efforts with Israel-Palestine and somewhat supportive of normalization with Israel. It concludes with a clear message to the government supporting further conflict resolution and normalization efforts, as well as better ties with the West.<sup>335</sup> Interestingly, TESEV makes note that while this study was not based on what the government

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<sup>332</sup> See J.McGann, 1992. Academics to ideologues: A brief history of the public policy research industry. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 25(4), pp.733-740. p.733

<sup>333</sup> Interview Mensur Akgun, op cit.

<sup>334</sup> Mensur Akgun et al, 2011. p.5.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid

has determined as the main foreign-policy issues, but instead based on the trends and expectations of the public, these two 'are never far away from each other'.<sup>336</sup> Once again, while direct influence here is impossible to determine, the importance of TESEV's research is that it provides a bridge and a forum for public opinion on foreign-policy issues.

There are three audiences for think tanks seeking policy debate: the media, the government and the public. Given that both the media and the government are focused on the public, the influence think tanks claim is in setting the parameters and igniting public debate, which impacts on public opinion. Public opinion is important in terms of influence because if a policy issue is not deemed important by voters, the success of the policy is undermined. Think tanks contribute to the foreign-policy agenda in other ways too: the most important of which is in providing input to the media and government, conducting surveys of the public and offering indicators to the government regarding the legitimacy of certain policies. Although the government still maintains its power in setting the agenda, it is through media and the experts providing content that an issue arises and is given importance. This can be seen in media and think tanks' focus on conflict resolution, regional normalization and mediation which were then found to be the primary foreign-policy issues within TESEV's public opinion surveys. In this, think tank intellectuals play a role in legitimizing the AKP's foreign-policy agenda. This is an important function of think tanks, for the AKP to garner a certain level of support for its agenda.

## **2.4 Communication**

Think tanks are part of an ever-growing global communications network between and within policy, academic, civil-society, media and business elites. This transnational communication, transmission and dissemination of new ideas and research is one of the primary functions of think tanks. Societal-level contact has been consistently raised as an important and relatively lacking factor inhibiting Turkey's rapprochement with the region, particularly Israel. The extent of interaction between Turkish and Middle Eastern institutes has grown exponentially over the past few decades, and is becoming increasingly formalized in nature.<sup>337</sup> The general aims of such networks are to facilitate and institutionalize dialogue, hence the focus on conflicting countries such as Israel and Palestine, Pakistan and Afghanistan, Turkey and Iran and Armenia and Cyprus.<sup>338</sup> Every think tank explored in this chapter hosts multiple international meetings between Turkish statesmen and foreign officials/ diplomats, including presidents and prime ministers. Photographs of these high level meetings, often exhibited in the main entrance to the institution, offer a visual sense of the importance and efficiency of

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<sup>336</sup> Ibid

<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid



think tanks bringing together world leaders.<sup>339</sup> As such, think tanks act as an important public diplomat, geared towards communicating Turkey's foreign-policy message to both domestic and international audiences.

These institutes conduct multilateral talks, including representatives from civil-society, the media and government from across MENA with the aim of communicating Turkey's foreign-policy agenda and offering Turkey as a 'model' for democratic development in the region. TESEVs joint Democracy Assistance Dialogue programme, run alongside the Turkish government at the G-8's Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative and GPoTs various joint projects, including 'Towards a Better Life: Improving the Judiciary, Media and Civil-society in the Middle East and North Africa' all function in this capacity. The aim of this ongoing workshop is to critically evaluate the state of democracy in MENA and to come up with tangible policy recommendations on how to improve it. A notable element of this workshop, which began in 2009, was addressing the 'Turkish model' and how this could contribute to development in MENA.<sup>340</sup> The Turkish model is proposed by not only GPoT, but TESEV, TEPAV, USAK and ORSAM, highlighting how prevalent this discourse was amongst CSOs and how it was communicated to international audiences. As with the government, there are underlying interests behind the construction of this hegemonic discourse. Organizations such as TEPAV, as the think tank of TOBB, have a vested interest in portraying a positive image of Turkey abroad to attract foreign investment. In this, they support the hegemony and ideology of the AKP's vernacularized neoliberalism as they benefit materially from the development of Turkey as a trading state.

The research and discourse of civil-society on this topic can be seen as the substance behind the government's discourse, and arguably one of the factors legitimizing this narrative among MENA civil-society circles, and even the public sphere. TESEVs regular public opinion surveys in the Middle East/ Arab world show that public opinion towards Turkey was very high during the years this narrative was dominant, 2009-2010 in particular. According to TESEVs survey, one of the factors contributing to this was that 'Turkey has been increasingly seen as playing constructive roles in the region, trying to turn its presence into a positive influence.'<sup>341</sup> I would argue that this is at least in part symptomatic of civil-society's communicative value and initiatives in the Middle East. Think tanks run, and contribute to constructing a culture of cooperative projects which are important elements in the evolving regional security dialogue between Turkey and Middle Eastern countries. Think tanks provide

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<sup>339</sup> Participant observation while working at USAK, December 2012.

<sup>340</sup> Global Political Trends Center, Towards a Better Life: Improving the Judiciary, Media and Civil-society in the Middle East and North Africa. Events. Accessed through: <http://www.gpotcenter.org/events/259>. (10/10/2015)

<sup>341</sup> M.Altunışık., 2008. The Possibilities and Limits of Turkey's Soft-power in the Middle East. Insight Turkey, 10(2)., p.1.

a relatively neutral forum for international communication and in this, are a key channel of track II diplomacy, gathering together government ministers, diplomats, NGO representatives, academics and journalists and promoting informal dialogue and exchange. These networks are conducive to diplomacy. Departing from closed door, high politics meetings; track II diplomacy methods connect decision-makers globally, ideally introducing new ideas and perspectives and institutionalizing societal ties. Although think tanks in Turkey have not always been viewed positively by status quo actors, they have not been subject to the same marginalization and attacks as oppositional business associations or faith-based charities. This may be because they tend to play a merely advisory/ communicative role in the policy-making process, rather than attempting to pursue foreign relations autonomously as with the other two groups.

Unlike ideological (faith-based NGOs and charities) or profit-driven organizations (business associations), ‘national interest’ appears to be the driving force behind think tanks’ activities.<sup>342</sup> This can explain the different experience of the three groups. Think tanks present themselves, and are generally perceived to be, objective, informative knowledge producers. Their actual activities abroad are limited to transnational communication networks, dialogue and policy advice, which has led some to be critical of think tanks as more ‘tank’ than ‘think’. These has not been significant generation of new ideas from Turkey’s think tank sector. They do however form the body of knowledge and expert advice necessary for elected officials to pursue better foreign-policy. Their value lies in their ability to communicate with foreign governments, even during times of conflict, and to facilitate a political environment conducive to the successful conduct of foreign-policy. These transnational networks are arguably a constitutive aspect of Turkey’s foreign relations and are certainly a method by which think tanks seek to engage and amplify their voice and impact on the foreign-policy process. This has been the communicative role of think tanks, and the following sub-section will offer examples and cases of how think tanks’ expert advice, information, ideas and communication have been implemented and form the societal infrastructure behind policy decisions, not only in Turkey but abroad.

## **2.5 Ideas to influence**

One of the main ideas input by think tanks has materialized in Turkey’s changing security perspectives. The role of non-state actors in redefining securitization and civilianizing foreign-policy has been discussed throughout this thesis, however the long-term impact of think tanks’ ideas on changing the climate of elite opinion is yet to be examined. Turkey’s changing threat perception and transition from inward-facing conservative military approach towards integration and rapprochement with the Middle East was dominated by the AKP. Nevertheless,

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<sup>342</sup> Conclusion drawn from field work.

the changing political discourses enabling and legitimizing this transition came from a range of actors, in particular think tanks, who formed the intellectual backbone behind Turkey's soft-power paradigm. The desecuritization pursued by civil-society actors such as TUSIAD and TESEV in the early 2000s, as well as increasing public debate over foreign-policy issues following the 2003 Iraq War, were important domestic factors that produced an environment conducive to new security conceptions, ideas and rapprochement with the Middle East.<sup>343</sup> The marginalization of military actors additionally opened space for civil-society involvement in foreign relations, clear in the contributions of GPoT and TESEV in normalization efforts with Greece, Cyprus and Armenia.. Turkey's regional relations were now determined in a new elite context based changing attitudes and the centrality of peace and cooperation within public and official discourses.<sup>344</sup>

Behind these changing security perceptions there was a concurrent rise in think tanks' discussions of traditional security paradigms. Israel for example was long held as Turkey's only ally in the region, however with the end of the Cold War polarity and subsequent marginalization of the military, Turkish-Israeli relations were made vulnerable. The security-centric strategic partnership between the two was eroded, replaced with a human-rights based discursive conflict and finally culminating in the Mavi Marmara incident. Following which, Israel could have been portrayed within intellectual circles and the media as a threat to national security, yet it wasn't. Think tanks, often driven by business and western-orientated interests due to funding, incubated the idea that maintaining good relations with Israel was crucial to establishing Turkey as a regional interlocker and model democracy, as well as in sustaining multilateral relations with the US and the EU. Israel as opposed to northern Iraq or Syria is used as the case here because rather than being simply a tool to enact and legitimize government policy, think tanks attempted to fulfil their ideal role in generating new ideas. It was also through changing relations with Israel based on security dynamics that Turkey was able to pursue the 'zero problems' policy, with think tanks publishing a significant body of work that portrayed regional relations as a balancing act between security and national interest as opposed to a zero-sum game. Although this failed to translate into policy, what is notable here is not the effect, but rather the input and attempts on behalf of think tanks to create a societal basis to stabilize state-level relations between the two countries. Furthermore, Turkey's freeze in diplomatic relations with Israel represents an interesting example of how growing competitiveness and pluralism within civil-society has impacted on TFP.

Whilst Turkey's status quo relations with Israel were based upon an overarching (in)security paradigm, the Mavi Marmara crisis, as well as Turkey's links to Hamas and rapprochement

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<sup>343</sup> Ibid

<sup>344</sup> Aras and Polat., op cit.

with Syria and Iran saw a total collapse in diplomatic relations. This collapse was in large part due to the socio-moral activities, ideas and debate within the public sphere and civil-society groups. Think tanks largely opposed this deterioration, using the media, conferences and publications to put forth an agenda of conflict resolution and peacebuilding. One reason for this may be their connections to the business community, which benefits from trade with Israel. This is not the sole reason however. Think tanks rarely have the same kind of normative basis or human rights focus of charities. Even amongst think tanks that could broadly be defined as ‘oppositional’, their primary focus remains that of an ‘objective’ approach to ‘national interest’. As well as impelling research into regional rapprochement to ensure stability, these foreign-policy institutes do not want Turkey to lose historical allies.<sup>345</sup> There were no examples of prominent think tanks taking a stance against Israel, nor of the idea that good relations with Israel preclude good relations with Arab states (or vice versa), although it is cited as a restriction by some such as TESEV. Almost all the organizations examined here have worked independently on improving relations between Turkey and Israel, hosting trade delegations, workshops, interfaith dialogue activities and producing research publications encouraging the normalization of relations.<sup>346</sup>

This has been such a dominant focus of Turkish think tanks that all initiatives cannot be detailed here, however some of the most high-level and ‘influential’ activities will be discussed now. USAK and TESEV in particular have worked on this, producing multiple publications, organizing panels such as TESEV’s ongoing civil-society panel with Israel’s Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and workshops aiming at reconstructing bilateral ties. The Global Political Trends Centre however has been the most active organization working in this field. GPoT works explicitly on conflict resolution with Israel, as well as with Cyprus and Armenia and they have successfully included their activities within the scope of official track II diplomacy. The founding director, Mensur Akgun, is well established within political circles, accompanying both Erdoğan and Davutoğlu on diplomatic trips (particularly to Armenia and Cyprus) and claimed to be regularly consulted in both a personal and professional capacity by elite decision-makers – highlighting the recurrent theme of inter-personal relations as one of the main forms of communication between CSOs and government.<sup>347</sup> GPoT has a bilateral engagement network with Israeli NGOs and diplomats, and works closely with the Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies (Mitvim) in particular. They conduct regular meetings to analyse regional developments and create new policy alternatives to improve relations.<sup>348</sup> GPoT closely followed high-level developments in diplomatic relations, and following Israeli

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<sup>345</sup> Interview with Yegin, op cit.

<sup>346</sup> Interviews with GPoT, USAK, IPC, and SETA op cit.

<sup>347</sup> Interview with Akgun, op cit.

<sup>348</sup> Global Political Trends Center, MITVIM-GPoT Center 3rd Policy Dialogue. Events. <http://www.gpotcenter.org/events/1086>. Accessed 20/01/16.

Prime Minister Netanyahu's apology to Turkey, began their efforts.<sup>349</sup> The level of involvement at this time can be explained for a few reasons; (i) firstly Turkey's reluctance to accept the apology and begin normalization efforts left a void in which civil-society actors could begin their own track II diplomacy and (ii) subsequent signals from the government indicated a willingness to resolve ties but a need for support in their negotiation efforts.

GPoT, alongside their counterpart Mitvim and a group of independent think tanks have held meetings and briefings with experts, politicians and diplomats, as well as conferences and workshops. They have actively disseminated this information to the media, as well as writing multiple opinion editorials advocating for Turkish-Israeli rapprochement. These are important examples of communication, agenda setting and informing which I argue created an environment conducive to reconciliation. Public opinion towards Israel has been at an all-time low since the Mavi Marmara crisis and as such, the AKP have been under pressure not to accept an Israeli apology alone. GPoT are particularly active in involving journalists and media representatives in their workshops and meetings, showing an acute awareness of their role of 'informer' and their understanding of the domestic factors inhibiting reconciliation. Nimrod Goren, founder and chairman of Mitvim- GPoT's Israeli counter-part, stated that negotiations had been stopped on several occasions due to domestic political considerations. This illustrates the conflicting approaches between different types of CSOs: with think tanks, business associations and intellectuals advocating reconciliation, and human rights based organizations and faith-charities often opposing this. Goren further asserted the need for additional channels of civil-society dialogue to a new chapter in Turkish-Israeli relations to begin".<sup>350</sup> Former ambassador to Israel Oğuz Çelikkol has similarly emphasised the importance of civil-society dialogue, stating that: "In a time when the negotiations between Israel and Palestine have come to a deadlock, such reconciliation will ensure a new breath to the region. And the civil-society should continue their efforts to reinforce people-to-people contacts."<sup>351</sup> However he also argued that this was not sufficient in and of itself, but rather should be substantiated by further societal links through business and tourism.

This raises one of the ongoing themes of this thesis: that civil-society in its ideal can and should play a role when state-level initiatives are lacking. Through agenda setting, informing and communication, they have the capacity to mobilize public pressured for policy-making, which although limited, was shown to be one of the many domestic factors driving TFP. They also have the potential to offer expert advice on how to pursue rapprochement, and interviewees cited numerous occasions when they have been used by government actors for research, and

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<sup>349</sup> Interview with Akgun, op cit.

<sup>350</sup> Civil-society sector eager to play role in Turkey-Israel rapprochement. *The Journal of Turkish Weekly*, May 22, 2014. Accessed through: <http://www.turkishweekly.net/2014/05/22/news/civil-society-sector-eager-to-play-role-in-turkey-israel-rapprochement/> (11/01/16).

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

as a quasi-neutral forum to meet with conflicting actors. This was the case following Mavi Marmara, and according to GPoT and USAK, even when official diplomatic meetings were discontinued, think tanks were encouraged by the AKP to continue with track II reconciliation efforts.<sup>352</sup> This is one of the most important examples of think tanks' 'influence' as being more than utilitarian as they have autonomously provided a necessary channel of interaction for conflicting parties, mobilized public debate and contributed towards conflict resolution.

## 2.6 Actual influence?

Think tanks are under pressure to demonstrate policy impact. While all interviewees had an awareness of the difficulty in demonstrating tangible impact on specific policies or bills, they did however claim to have a broader impact in terms of creating public dialogue and shaping public opinion, as well as fostering important domestic and international networks between researchers, experts, media figures, civil-society representatives and politicians. The media is the main medium through which experts disseminate their view and agenda: writing op-eds, appearing on television and publicizing their events. Weidenbaum argues that the main function of think tanks is to provide journalists with information.<sup>353</sup> While this is reductionist as think tanks evidently play an advocacy role as well, this is certainly an important aspect of their activities: communicating with the public and the government, providing legitimacy, publicity and 'objective' empirical information for foreign-policy decisions. Turkey's renewed diplomatic and economic relations with the Middle East was justified to a nervous public and secular elite by think tanks' reports and research on the pragmatic rationale behind this. According to Ghanim, the AKP was reliant on the legitimacy and practical framework offered by think tanks in its efforts to reformulate an Islamic agenda into a pragmatic one which was agreeable within the public sphere.<sup>354</sup> As such, think tanks arguably provided the intellectual basis for the expansion of TFP.

The proliferation of think tanks focussing on the Middle East/ Arab world under the AKP was one of the factors facilitating the normalization of relations prior to the Arab Spring. Anti-Arab sentiment was (and remains to a degree) strong in Turkey. Much of this was based on historical memory, nationalism and lack of understanding.<sup>355</sup> This has been rectified to a degree by the ideas and education provided by think tanks and experts specializing in this field.<sup>356</sup> The popularization of rapprochement, of Turkey as a soft-power and regional hegemon, ideas that just a few years' prior would not have been politically feasible, was developed by the think tank sector and through the media. Think tanks have contributed to the

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<sup>352</sup> Interviews GPoT and USAK.

<sup>353</sup> M. Weidenbaum. Measuring the Influence of Think Tanks. *Social Science and Public Policy*, 2010.

<sup>354</sup> D. Ghanim, Turkish Democracy and Political Islam. *Middle East Policy*. Issue 1, vol. 16. 2009.

<sup>355</sup> Participant observation and field interviews

<sup>356</sup> Güvenç, in Cerit-Mazlum and Doğan eds, op cit.

ideas, opinions and public debates necessary for an environment conducive to rapprochement and normalization, as well as in creating the transnational societal communication mechanisms which enable and stabilize track II diplomacy efforts. However much of the critique of the ideal role as opposed to the practices of Turkish think tanks portrays them in many ways as simply tools through which to enact governmental wishes. As such, the following section will critically assess how underlying interests behind think tanks' research, including those of the government, but business interests and those of foreign donors compete in this sphere and in so, fulfil a more active role in introducing competitiveness, conflicting ideas and autonomous channels for foreign relations.

### **3. Classifying Think Tanks in Turkey**

Having critically assessed the strategies by which think tanks seek influence over foreign relations from a predominantly theoretical standpoint, this section will detail specific organizations based on the interests driving them. This is to determine both the changing relations between CSOs and the government under the AKP, and the impact of interest on foreign relations. The publications, networks and channels of communication between think tanks, the media and the government will be the primary focus. However, access to government was found to be the main factor facilitating or inhibiting think tanks from impacting on foreign-policy and as such, think tanks' formal and informal ties with policy elites will be explored.<sup>357</sup> Through assessing interest and identity, think tanks in Turkey have been grouped into three categories: government affiliated, business affiliated and independent/semi-independent. Which category the organization belongs to has a direct and palpable impact upon their autonomy, agenda and influence. The following sections on GNGOs, BNGOs and InNGOs will offer detailed contextual and conceptual evidence as to the activities of six think tanks: exploring topics such as mediation, rapprochement, economic interdependence and international aid and how their activities form the intellectual backbone behind TFP in the Middle East.

#### **3.1 Governmental NGOs (GNGOs)**

GNGOs, which also includes organizations that perform contract research for the government such as ORSAM and USAK share a policy orientation, and close relationship with government agencies, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in this case. They rely on the government for funding and often produce work on contract which is not disseminated to the public. They also produce

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<sup>357</sup> A number of studies have identified 'access' as the core factor; M.C Miller., 2013. India's Feeble Foreign-policy: A Would-Be Great Power Resists Its Own Rise. *Foreign Affairs*, 92 (3), pp.14-19; and Abelson, 2006, op cit, for examples.

accessibly policy issue papers that are disseminated to policy makers and diplomats directly. Underlying is often a strong ideological, moral and partisan world view, however this is not generally transparent in Turkey, as opposed to in the US which has a culture of advocacy tanks. GNGOs arguably both the most and least important in terms of think tanks' role in foreign relations. The most, because they have been a crucial tool on behalf of policy elites in communicating and sustaining the AKP's foreign-policy and security paradigm, supporting its hegemony and continuity. The least important insofar as their direct ties to government could negate their independence to the degree that they are simply tools of elites.

That said, instances of direct governmental intervention were found to be minimal. Although dependent on funding from government sources, GNGOs such as SETA are autonomous in defining their research agenda and policy focus. This is because there is arguably little need for direct control. Viewed from a positive light, this is because SETA is well known as a pro-government think tank. Experts attracted to working there, due to the partisanship embedded in Turkish society, would largely be personally pro-government, or at least non-partisan. Hakan Yilmaz, a democratization expert and director of TÜSIAD's Foreign-policy Forum stated during interviews that SETA analysts are all candidates for the AKP, set up by the government, showing the revolving door between these groups.<sup>358</sup> From a negative point of view, self-censorship is so widespread in Turkey that oppositional experts would naturally tone down critical views. Given the organic ties between these groups, the most plausible explanation is a combination of the above explanations. That they share an understanding of foreign-policy priorities with policy elites, they benefit materially and in terms of status from operating as public diplomats and that any over criticism is stemmed by self-censorship and partisanship. As such, this section explores how government ties has impacted on the agenda and interests of two GNGOs, offering an additional section exploring their relationship with the government and status as a tool by which elites can establish consensus and garner legitimacy. It concludes that regardless of the interests driving GNGOs, they still play a unique role as public diplomats and in enduring the legitimacy and credibility of the AKP's foreign-policy.

### **3.11 The International Strategic Research Foundation (USAK)**

Established in 2004, USAK is an Ankara-based think tank, as with most government-affiliated foreign-policy institutes. They are widely thought of amongst the think tank sector as one of the most developed, modern institutions and became one of the most consulted and recognized sources of information and expert advice on Turkish foreign-policy whilst enjoying close ties

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<sup>358</sup> Interview with Yilmaz, op cit.



with the AKP.<sup>359</sup> It had a diverse staff, almost exclusively western educated and bilingual, with many Middle East experts. They enjoyed significant media coverage and attendance for their events from policy elites. Whilst comfortably centre-right on the Turkish political spectrum, they proclaim to provide alternative views in the study of international relations which per their mission statement: “suffers from a limited Western-centric understanding”. Recent developments and their alleged Gulenist affiliation, USAK enjoyed very close relations with the government and was commissioned for multiple government contracts on issues of security, energy policy and the Kurdish conflict.

Regarding their non-oppositional stance, Yegin argued that there are better methods to influence the government than being critical. He stated that USAK meets with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, as well as high level bureaucrats, ambassadors and government officials from around the world on a frequent basis, including army officials from Pakistan and the US among others, who come to learn about security issues in the Middle East. According to Yegin, such official visits bring the ability to directly or indirectly influence government offices.<sup>360</sup> USAKs President Özdem Sanberk has served as an ambassador and for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was chief foreign-policy advisor under Özal, retiring in 2000, and transitioning immediately to the think tank sector.<sup>361</sup> Yegin cites this as an example of the connections and influence of USAK, arguing that due to his previous position in the Ministry, he is well known in policy circles; “We have different channels to interact with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.”<sup>362</sup> This once again illustrates the pervasive theme of personal connections for civil-society-state relations = and the patrimonial basis of influence. This is damaging to the independence of these institutions, and restricts them from their function as a source of new ideas. However, given the quasi-authoritarian nature of the Turkish state, avoiding criticism and fostering interpersonal relations is a logical strategy by which to seek influence, and for self-preservation.

Rather than generating new ideas or operating as a check on state power then, the central role here appears to be to advocate and communicate pre-existing policies. What we see in USAKs agenda, through their publications and in their Journal of Turkish Weekly (JTW), are strong inclinations towards Turkey’s improving relations with the Middle East, Israel, Central Asian states, China and Russia compared to articles on the EU or US. In this, USAK plays a legitimizing and consensus-building role based on the AKP’s foreign-policy orientation. Aside from their publications however, they have been contracted by the Ministry of Interior to

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<sup>359</sup> USAK was referred to by multiple interviewees as the most developed think tank in reference to US institutions.

<sup>360</sup> Interview with Yegin op cit.

<sup>361</sup> International Strategic Research Organization. Staff and Structure. <http://www.usak.org.tr/en/staff-structure/usak-president> Accessed; 11/09/2015

<sup>362</sup> Interview with Yegin, op cit.

research on security and terrorism. They asserted that the government has no impact on the content or questions about what to write, even on politically sensitive topics such as the Kurdish separatism which USAK advises on.<sup>363</sup> The research for these projects is not public, however they claim to be able to generate new ideas and challenge government policy. The government's wish to keep this research confidential could indicate this is the case as any critical research would be private, however USAKs self-preservation and ties to government officials indicate that this would not be fully 'objective' regardless.

During research, the only space for GNGOs to act as more than a tool of elites was in track II conflict resolution initiatives. USAK quickly became involved in track II diplomacy following the Mavi Marmara crisis. According to Yegin, USAK pursued several initiatives in normalizing Turkish-Israeli relations, meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs before and after the workshops and conferences to communicate developments. This is important as it occurred during the freeze in diplomatic relations, and shows the role think tanks can play in sustaining societal contact when conflict occurs. The meetings with government officials before and after show that this role is supported by the AKP, and that there was a period in which nominally state powers were outsourced to non-state actors due to domestic pressure inhibiting state-level diplomacy. Equally demonstrative of the ability of GNGOs to serve in this capacity was USAK president, Özdem Sanberk's role in the UN panel investigating Mavi Marmara. Sanberk reportedly met with officials on numerous occasions throughout the course of this investigation, informing the government of developments.<sup>364</sup> This illustrates the possible role GNGOs can play as a mediator, communicator and channel of interaction for inter-state relations and is perhaps the most positive contribution these organizations can make given their extremely limited independence.

USAK also claims to have played a role in Turkish-Iraqi bilateral normalization. Although outside of the time-frame of this thesis, it is worth mentioning in brief as another example of the potential impact of civil-society led dialogue. USAK hosted Ibrahim al-Jaafari, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Iraq at a conference in 2014.<sup>365</sup> Yegin stated that this event was the first time al-Jaafari specifically addressed previous difficulties in bilateral relations and publicly declared a willingness to resolve these problems and further develop political and economic relations. Although USAK may have overstated their role here as al-Jaafari had also met with government officials previously that day, the public element of this is important and reflects the communicative value of think tanks. The Israeli and Iraqi cases both represent examples of track II diplomacy efforts, particularly valuable for providing

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<sup>363</sup> Ibid

<sup>364</sup> Ibid

<sup>365</sup> M.Hecan, Iraqi Foreign Minister al-Jaafari delivers speech at USAK house. USAK, News. November 6, 2014. Accessed through: <http://www.usak.org.tr/en/publications/news/iraqi-foreign-minister-al-jaafari-delivers-speech-at-usak-house> on (05/02/2016)

an open forum for stakeholders to come together and for the public to better view diplomacy. USAK has hosted Erdoğan, Davutoğlu and Gül over the years, as well as international officials, particularly Israeli and Palestinian MPs, as well as journalists and international think tank officials. They have exchange agreements and partnerships with Pakistani think tanks, as well as relations with think tanks in Iraq, Syria, Israel, Egypt and Jordan. These relations entail dialogue, bilateral visits and collaborative projects.<sup>366</sup> This knowledge transfer of the Turkish model is a recurrent theme of think tanks' activities and reflective of their role as a public diplomat and element of Turkey's nation brand.

While SETA is certainly a GNGO, USAK is more tentatively placed in this category. Their pro-government stance appears to be more preservationist than inbuilt. The two directors of academic staff, Hasan Cerhozi and Ihsan Bal unusually do not appear to have any direct personal links with the AKP but rather have attempted to establish institutional connections attracting government officials at a more formal level than is common in Turkey. They receive a major part of their funding from the Ministry of Interior which may explain USAKs aversion to being overtly critical of foreign (or domestic) policy and self-censorship practices. Notably, this extends to not criticizing nations with whom Turkey has good relations with; indicative USAKs agenda of 'national interest' and self-perception of the institute as a constitutive element of Turkey's image abroad.<sup>367</sup> Also in terms of their self-perception and agenda, Ihsan Bal's comments are evocative. He argued that "Turkey is trying to become involved in solutions to conflicts in the Middle East and the Caucasus. Its most valuable fuel is think tanks".<sup>368</sup> This comment was made as a critique of arguments that funding biases think tanks and is illustrative of Bal's views on the responsibility and potential of think tanks to support governmental policy, a view also articulated by SETA.<sup>369</sup> The self-perception of USAK as a channel by which to enact state policies rather than generate new ideas or criticism shows that they are not fulfilling their ideal role as a think tanks, but rather serving as a tool for elites in reinforcing the hegemonic discourse of the government.

### **3.12 Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA)**

SETA, as with all think tanks, claims to be a source of objective and neutral scientific research. Despite this proclaimed 'neutrality', the institute is broadly believed to function as a government mouth-piece and given its organic ties and funding dependency on the

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<sup>366</sup> Interview with Yegin, op cit.

<sup>367</sup> Practices observed during my work placement at USAK.

<sup>368</sup> C.Önel. Harnessing the power of think tanks: AK Party builds its own parallel structure. Today's Zaman, January 26, 2014. Accessed through: [http://www.todayszaman.com/national\\_harnessing-the-power-of-think-tanks-ak-party-builds-its-own-parallel-structure\\_337617.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/national_harnessing-the-power-of-think-tanks-ak-party-builds-its-own-parallel-structure_337617.html) on (19/07/2015).

<sup>369</sup> Research Turkey, Interview with Bekir Gur. Accessed through: <http://researchturkey.org/interview-with-mr-bekir-gur-foundation-for-political-economic-and-social-research-seta/> on (25/09/2016)

government, its 'civil' status should be assessed very critically. That said, the mere existence of SETA as a quasi-governmental organization shows the rising currency of think tanks and the growing image of them as a check on, and source for, decision-making. SETA analyst Bekir Gür expresses, perhaps inadvertently, the role of SETA well, arguing that it is not their job to make decisions, however there is an opportunity for influence so long as organizations avoid confrontational language. This appears to be the precise role of SETA, encouraging and developing positive public and foreign-policy decisions such as democratization, providing civilian input, but refraining from criticising the government. They have a very high regard for the AKP's inclusion of scientific knowledge and openness to public demands, not only related to their own input but based seemingly only on belief. Gür describes the influence of domestic factors on the AKP's decision-making, arguing that: "the party either surveys different civil-society organizations or seeks input from key informants in particular cities. They probably use several other mechanisms that we do not even know about."<sup>370</sup> Such a solid belief in the AKP's integration of civil-society actors belies much of what was found during this research in indicating systematic and formalized consultancy rather than informal patronage networks.

Director of foreign-policy, Ufuk Ulutaş, defended SETAs status as a CSO, claiming that there is simply an affinity: an overlap in terms of political vision based on SETA and the AKP's similar socio-political roots. He also emphasised that any pro-AKP allegiances were personal rather than institutionally directed, and that it is a natural development for some SETA staff to progress into government.<sup>371</sup> SETAs journal *Insight Turkey* is well-known and broadly respected internationally, with key diplomats and AKP policy makers contributing articles. These institutional links are embedded between SETA and the AKP, which Ulutaş claimed advantages SETA over other institutions as they are able to check directly what the governments' position on certain issues is when assessing and researching Turkey's foreign relations. Despite such close and seemingly organic links, Ulutaş reaffirmed that funding is not used to direct the research of SETA and that they determine their own research agenda.<sup>372</sup> Nevertheless, this agenda seems to directly correspond with that of the state and there are strong and continual references to 'soft-power', 'humanitarian diplomacy' 'interdependence' and 'normalization'- also the buzzwords of the AKP. In this, SETA can be seen as a tool of legitimacy and publicity for the AKP. However, SETA founder Ibrahim Kalın was one of the first advocates of this discourse, as early as 2006 in an article for *Zaman* and prior to Davutoğlu's appointment to the Foreign Ministry which brought soft-power to the fore of policy debates. The close relations between Kalın and the AKP, and subsequent adoption of

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<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

‘soft-power’ as a hegemonic discourse is indicative of the role of think tanks in popularizing ideas, as a source of personnel and expertise for the government.

Ulutaş discussed the organizations’ focus on the Middle East, indicating a dual rationale: firstly, due to the research profiles of SETA experts who are almost all Middle East specialists.<sup>373</sup> Secondly, because Turkey’s foreign-policy agenda was focussed on the region. Ulutaş claimed that “there was a high demand for research on the Middle East and SETA tried to fill that gap.”<sup>374</sup> The majority of their published content is focused on Middle East foreign-policy, referencing terms such as: security, economy, culture and energy, also reflected in the AKP’s ‘soft-power’ discourse. I believe this reflects a mutually-dependent relationship between research and policy, the partisanship that has driven this academic research but also, the need of government agencies for think tanks as a legitimizing tool. Ulutaş argued that SETA was not only following the governments’ agenda, but concentrating on the Middle East because of this high demand and particularly, a vacuum in terms of economic research. He cited geopolitics as another reason driving SETAs engagement with the Middle East, claiming that SETAs proximity to the field as well as familiarity with the actors facilitates good working partnerships.<sup>375</sup> Ulutaş also claimed that SETA takes public interest into consideration as well as the governments’ agenda, arguing that public interest in the Middle East has risen dramatically, particularly since the Arab Spring, however SETAs Middle East orientation pre-dates the Arab Spring indicating that responsiveness to public opinion may be an intended image rather than reality.

SETA has worked on normalization and conflict resolution with northern Iraq and Iraq and has claimed a role in Turkey’s northern Iraqi policy.<sup>376</sup> According to Ulutaş their efforts are based on SETAs pro-cooperation agenda for the region and they are making recommendations to the Turkish government to find a balance between relations with Erbil and Baghdad through conflict resolution initiatives in dialogued and track II diplomacy.<sup>377</sup> The Center for Middle East Strategic Studies (ORSAM), although not explicitly focused on here due to their position as a government-sponsored rather than affiliated think tanks, has taken an equally active approach in working on normalization with northern Iraq. Turkey’s engagement and political opening with Erbil was arguably facilitated by growing interest within the think tank sector on dialogue, economic cooperation and diplomacy with Iraqi Kurds which will be discussed below.<sup>378</sup> I argue that the AKP’s engagement with multiple actors, both state and non-state,

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<sup>373</sup> Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research, Experts. Accessed through: <http://setav.org/en/SETA/Experts/1>. (26/01/16).

<sup>374</sup> Interview with Ulutaş op cit.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid.

<sup>376</sup> Güvenç, op cit., p.11.

<sup>377</sup> Interview with Ulutaş, op cit.

<sup>378</sup> Interview with Bilge Duman of ORSAM, Ankara, 13 October 2015.

helped alleviate mistrust and lack of understanding between the two sides, creating a political environment conducive to rapprochement. During Barzani's visit to Ankara in 2010, which paved the way for normalization, he was received by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and hosted by SETA, TÜSIAD and ORSAM. Kurdish analyst Veysel Ayhan cited this as particularly important insofar as it showed the northern Iraqi delegation that they would be treated with the same protocols as Baghdad leaders Ammar al-Hakim and Ayad Allawi were during their trip, proving that Turkey's policy was egalitarian.<sup>379</sup>

During his speech at ORSAM, Barzani supported the continuation of Turkish trade and construction in Northern Iraq, and stated that the region would become a "bridge between Turkey and Iraq and the Gulf states."<sup>380</sup> Economic cooperation, energy projects, the PKK, normalization of diplomatic relations and social dialogue were also discussed during the meeting; emphasising the importance of this visit, Barzani stated that this will begin a new era in relations with Turkey. Obviously both the Turkish and the Kurdish side were ready and willing to begin normalization at this point. The role of non-state actors was to provide an important quasi-neutral forum and facilitate dialogue and trust building, which appears to have had a successful result when looking at the statements of both Barzani and Davutoğlu. The joint dialogue initiatives also arguably created the foundation upon which normalization could be promoted, legitimized and publicized. There is of course a need to work in tandem with government policies and without a willingness on both sides of the elite, change would not be possible. The continued authority of the government over foreign-policy is natural, however it means that relations are unstable and linked to a particular administration. Given Turkey's historic grievances with Kurdish separatism, the establishment of societal ties not just from GNGOs but from the business community and CSOs more generally, is important if relations are to continue.

Ulutaş highlighted the same point in terms of Turkish-Israeli relations, stating that the major problem between Turkey and Israel is track II diplomacy, or lack thereof.<sup>381</sup> Ulutaş stated that Israel lost all their major contacts in Turkey after 2002 as most of them were military and either imprisoned or retired. As such, Israel had difficulty making contact with Turkey and civil-society contact was very low. SETA and other think tanks have attempted to rectify this with the track II diplomacy efforts discussed throughout this thesis, however SETA (unlike the GPoT and other institutions) halted their efforts due to stalls in track I negotiations. This may be indicative of their position as an extension of official diplomatic institutions. Whereas InNGOs have continued their activities regardless of the governments' position on resolution,

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<sup>379</sup> Veysel Ayhan, An Analysis of Massoud Barzani's Visit to Turkey. Today's Zaman. July 6, 2010. Accessed through: [http://www.todayszaman.com/todays-think-tanks\\_an-analysis-of-massoud-barzanis-visit-to-turkey\\_215263.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/todays-think-tanks_an-analysis-of-massoud-barzanis-visit-to-turkey_215263.html) on (07/07/15).

<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid.

SETA coordinates track II diplomacy with that of the state. Ulutaş stated however that sustainable normalization cannot be achieved until there is a resolution of the Palestinian issue, highlighting the limitations not only of Turkish think tanks, but of Turkish foreign-policy in general as this is a significant narrative in public and media discourses.

In terms of involvement in Syria, SETA was the only Turkish think tank involved in Syria prior to the Arab Spring. Reflecting on the previous point regarding Israel, this is possibly due to their functioning as a GNGO and assisting the government with quasi-official track II diplomacy efforts. SETA was engaged with, and served as public diplomat for the AKP's dialogue and economic initiatives with Assad. Ulutaş stated that there is a strong connection between domestic and foreign-policy when it comes to Syria; that because of the social, economic, political and security issues caused by the Syrian crisis there are specific domestic constraints on the AKP's (or in fact, any parties) behaviour. Ulutaş claimed that the government is responsive to their policy recommendations on Syria, taking initiatives dependent on the governments' capacity and capability; "we are advising and they are doing it to a certain degree."<sup>382</sup> Ulutaş said that his frequent travel to the region as well as participation in negotiations give credibility to his research. It is important to note here that although Ulutaş is now a civil-society representative, he is the former director of the National Intelligence Agency's (MİT) press and human relations offices. With Ulutaş's position in government circles, it seems likely that such negotiations were at least condoned by the AKP policy-making elite.

SETA staff also have strong connections with state universities and the pro-government media such as TRT and *Daily Sabah*, as well as with government agencies such as TİKA and international institutions such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). SETA Director of Domestic Policy Nebi Miş's research, is also demonstrative of this close network of policy elite. His articles, particularly on Turkey's participation in the Alliance of Civilizations, mirror or are perhaps formative of the intellectual backbone of TFP. They boast a clever blend of the cultural and Islamic values espoused by the state, framed pragmatically in terms of Turkey's economic and political development. A public message aimed at appeasing and legitimizing the AKP's growing involvement in the Islamic world: rapprochement with Syria and role as mediator preceding the 2003 Iraq war.<sup>383</sup> Supportive of Davutoğlu's 'zero problems' paradigm, as well as Turkey's position as mediator between the Muslim and Western worlds, Miş's articles are the embodiment of the AKP's message. Research such as this, and other select papers from SETA, contributed to the dissemination and publicization of Davutoğlu's ideas – not only soft-power and the zero problems paradigms

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<sup>382</sup> Interview with Ulutaş op cit.

<sup>383</sup> Balcı and Miş, op cit.

but his neo-Ottoman ideas on re-orientation, regional leadership, civilizational ‘bridge’ politics, showing this connection of information and ideas within the policy-making elite to be a two-way street. From the convergence of discourse and practice between SETA and governmental agencies, a clear dependency relationship can be identified.

They publicize and widely disseminate policy position promoting normalization efforts with Iraq, Syria and Israel – which is also more broadly supportive of the governments’ ‘zero problems’ position, an agenda which has seemingly been assimilated by SETA staff.<sup>384</sup> *Zaman* columnist and foreign-policy analyst Cumali Önal however argued that it is thought that Ankara’s misguided approach to the Arab Spring and early misunderstanding of the situation was heavily influenced by SETA reports, apparently leading to the demise of ‘zero problems’ and diplomatic disputes not only with the region but also with the West.<sup>385</sup> SETA reports and analysis from this time generally encouraged the continued import of the Turkish model for democratization, promoting Turkish involvement in these conflicts. Most notably, in actively ‘spreading political movements from North Africa to the Middle East’ as discussed in SETA’s 2011 policy report.<sup>386</sup> They also focus on Israel as one of the factors causing regional instability, plausibly an explanation of SETA secession of normalization talks and the AKP’s reaction to the Mavi Marmara crisis as a method to gain Arab public support and further normalization and diplomatic relations with the Middle East.<sup>387</sup> Although such reports may well have influenced the AKP’s reading of the Arab Spring, it is important to note here that InNGOs promoted a similar approach to the relative unknowns of the situation in 2010, although not of such active engagement with opposition groups showing the alignment of Turkish think tanks along dominant interpretations of national interest.

### **3.13 Governmental NGOs or just governmental?**

Both SETA and USAK are conservative, with direct links to policy makers, the media, and Islamic business associations. In fact, their close relations with the government, while lending credence to the hypothesis proposed in this chapter that think tanks are increasingly capable of influencing foreign relations, may well challenge some of the core tenants of this assertion: namely that such influence is linked to political liberalization and democratic consolidation. By monopolizing the civil space open to non-state actors, they endanger pluralism in this sphere and rather than representing democratic modes of society - actually operate as a new elite, merely advancing the economic and political interests of the state and creating a kind of ‘echo chamber’ of opinions. This relates to the neo-Marxist and Gramscian theories discussed

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<sup>384</sup> Interview with Ulutaş, op cit.

<sup>385</sup> Önel, op cit.

<sup>386</sup> Taha Özhan et al, Turkey in 2011. SETA Policy Report, 2012. Accessed through: <http://setav.org/en/turkey-in-2011/policy-report/1062> (10/03/2015).

<sup>387</sup> Taha Özhan. The Arab Spring and Turkey: The Camp David Order vs. the New Middle East. *Insight Turkey* 13, no. 4 (2011): 55.



earlier in this thesis regarding the function of think tanks at the vanguard of state power and status quo class relations.<sup>388</sup> Think tanks operating in this context, rather than contributing to a vibrant and pluralistic civic space, instead perpetuate and entrench exclusion and further confine policy-making to a group of elite decision-makers: even if that group is now inclusive of non-state actors.

As aforementioned; there is no evidence of direct government intervention or control over the research activities of GNGOs; but there is also no need for it. The elite in both organization; İbriham Kalin of SETA, who has worked for the AKP government in various capacities, and USAKs president Özdem Sanberk, an ex-ambassador who worked for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under Özal have immersed both institutions in the networks and policy circles close to the AKP elite, state universities and the conservative business community. Sedat Laçiner for example is the head of USAKs Journal of Turkish Weekly, an English language daily news site which avoids criticism of the state and is subject to both overt and covert censorship. Moreover, journalists are encouraged to avoid criticism of Turkey's allies adding to the culture of self-censorship in Turkey.<sup>389</sup> Laçiner was appointed as the president of Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University (ÇOMÜ) by ex- President Abdullah Gül. He is also a regular contributor to pro-government news outlets such as TRT and the Star. Examples such as this continue throughout the staff of both SETA and USAK, showing the depth and breadth of connections between this small circle of the 'power elite'. This undermines 'pluralism' within policy-making and although there has been a diversification of the actors involved, their ideational-alignment means that policy is formed in a consensus culture dominated by a new hegemonic class. There remains some limited room for integration of non-affiliated think tanks however, and a surprising level of correlation in their aims, discourses and activities as will be discussed below.

### **3.2 Independent NGOs**

Despite being arguably the most vulnerable category, there are a large number of think tanks that broadly fall under the specification of 'independent'. Although self-censorship and extreme challenges posed by Turkey's limited freedom of speech and information inhibit any think tank operating on Turkish soil from being completely 'independent', organizations of this type are generally autonomous from direct government control, receive their funding from external or private sources (largely private universities and EU agencies), and declare themselves as 'objective' research institutes without political allegiance or goals. As such, they can be considered independent within the complex context of the Turkish political system.

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<sup>388</sup> H. Pautz., 2011. Revisiting the think-tank phenomenon. *Public Policy and Administration*, 26(4), pp.419-435.

<sup>389</sup> Participant observation at USAK, December 2012.

These institutions are generally established by academics, politicians or retired diplomats/bureaucrats. Their research focus and activities determined by the founders, as well as the full-time research staff, but also by funding and competition for resources. As aforementioned, particularly for EU funding, this moves these institutions to take a pro-EU and pro-democracy stance. Organizations falling under this category such as IKV, TESEV and IPC receive funding from the EU, as well as European and US foundations. This endows them with a greater domestic autonomy however equally impacts upon their research agenda. Carnegie Endowment for example, as well as similar western institutions, have an overt focus on democratization. This in part explains the research focus of institutions such as IPC, who concentrate on democracy building in the region and have both funding and institutional links with Carnegie.<sup>390</sup>

There remain domestic issues of autonomy for think tanks falling under the final category. Many still receive some funding from the Ministry of Interior, or else have been forced to rely on singular funding sources which leaves them vulnerable to government pressure and closure. The extent of the influence of this funding on autonomy proved undeterminable, however some broad conclusions can be drawn based on interviews and research. Governmental funding sources have an indirect and subtle impact on the autonomy of InNGOs. This impact is largely upon think tanks' ideal role in generating new ideas and critiquing the dominant policy discourse. As such, InNGOs adopt, rather than a critical stance, a self-preservationist and non-controversial one in proposing alternative policies through 'objective' scientific research. InNGOs focus on issues of broad national agreement such as Palestine, Turkmenistan and Myanmar. They also tend to diversify their interests, focussing on nations with which Turkey has limited engagement, and therefore not acting in defiance of any existing governmental policy such as conflict resolution between Afghanistan and Pakistan. This strategy of influence bares striking similarity to the strategies used by GNGOs discussed above however. What can be seen in these institutions' research and activities when compared to that of the state is a 'convergence'. Whether by accident or design, the most active InNGOs are directly working on pertinent foreign-policy issues that the government is directly involved in: acting as a channel of unofficial track II diplomacy which generally compliments government initiatives. The following subsections will examine the agenda and characteristics of InNGO actors, as well as detailing their specific track II diplomatic activities in the region to assess when and if independent influence has been had.

### **3.21 The Marmara Foundation**

The Marmara Foundation is one of Turkey's oldest think tanks. Established in 1985, it is one of the few think tanks established prior to the AKP period, and has received the apparent

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<sup>390</sup> Interview with Onur Sazak, IPC headquarters, Istanbul, March 13, 2014.

approval of successive administrations. Demirel, Özal and Erdoğan have all expressed their support for the organization over the years. They are a foundation partner with the Alliance of Civilizations, an observer at the UN Economic and Social Council and active in pursuing EU membership. Their annual Eurasian Economic Summit attracts high level attendance and media coverage: promoting trans-Eurasian economic and political integration. Although not actively critical of government policy in their own research, their conferences and panel discussion appear to be open spaces for debate with highly critical and oppositional voices included.<sup>391</sup> Their board of directors includes academics, diplomats, current MPs from both the ruling and opposition parties, as well as ex-military officials and business leaders.<sup>392</sup> This positions them as part of the new foreign-policy elite, but not is indicative that they are merely the extension of the ruling party as with organizations such as SETA. Further, although the Marmara Foundation benefits from business funding sources, this is diversified and supplemented by foreign donors meaning they have not been categorized as a BNGO.

The Marmara Foundation explicitly states their goal as one that ‘strives to common solutions to common problems through creating campaigns to pressure decision organs.’ This stands out from GNGOs, and NGOs prior to the AKP period in general by overtly depicting their agenda as one of advocacy. As aforementioned, the transition from think tanks playing a merely informative role towards and active influential role is in its infancy in Turkey, making the Marmara Foundations’ goal notable. Current President and founding member of the AKP Akkan Suver stated that: “This is the century of information, but I foresee that the coming years will be focused on the growth of NGOs. These organizations do not change, whereas governments are constantly shifting and evolving.” Although this is not yet the case in Turkey, this statement is indicative of think tanks’ self-perception, and perhaps more importantly, their approach towards decision-making as an evolving space for non-state actors. Furthermore, it edges at a continuing critique of Turkish foreign-policy and proposes a solution to this. The lack of continuity in TFP could be resolved through the participation of an enduring and influential think tank sector, a solution which has been voiced not only by the sector itself but multiple Turkish foreign-policy analysts and government officials such as the AKP’s Deputy Chairman of External Affairs and director for Strategic Communication, Suat Kınıklıoğlu.<sup>393</sup>

The Marmara Foundation’s economic summits offer a platform for Turkish investors and governments to come together and discuss needs and opportunities. Libya for example used

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<sup>391</sup> Marmara Group Strategic and Social Research. Interviews and conference listings.. Accessed through: <http://www.marmaragrubu.org/-marmara-group-foundation-is-intellectual-face-of-turkey-in-civil-society-area> on (11/01/16)

<sup>392</sup> Marmara Group Strategic and Social Research Foundation, Directors Executive Board 2015-2016. Accessed through: <http://www.marmaragrubu.org/directors> on (01/02/16)

<sup>393</sup> Suat Kınıklıoğlu, Turkey's think tank scene. *Hurriyet Daily News*, December 27, 2005. Accessed through: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-think-tank-scene.aspx?pageID=438&n=turkeys-think-tank-scene-2005-12-27> on (10/08/2015)

the 15<sup>th</sup> Summit to call for greater Turkish involvement in the country; particularly requesting knowledge transfer and expert advice in the spheres of energy, economic and environmental-technological development.<sup>394</sup> Following the summit, there was a direct increase in Turkish investment in Libya. In fact, Libya was one of seven MENA target countries out of fifteen total identified by the Ministry of Economy for diversification and increased of overall Turkish exports. Turkish Policy Quarterly identified economic forums as well as trade fairs, trade missions and policies as factors promoting these investments.<sup>395</sup> 2012 and 2013 saw a peak in Turkish investment and construction in Libya, prior to the exigencies of the civil war forcing Turkish business out.<sup>396</sup> One of the core focal points of the Marmara Foundation's economic summit is reinvigoration of the Silk Road. This issue has been the centre of multiple civil-society initiatives, with the Marmara Foundation, TEPAV and TOBB simultaneously lobbying for the lifting of visa restrictions to regenerate this trade route. This is indicative of the Marmara Foundation's underlying economic agenda but such activities have certainly been taken up by the government showing the convergence of business, societal and state interests.

There is also a strong ideological convergence. The summary from the 14<sup>th</sup> Summit stated that; 'religion was one of the strongest, the most widespread and the most dominant dynamics in the world, participants of the Summit claimed that societies in which religion and belief are dominant attract more attention by the people; that religion was a focal point in international relations and global politics; also that, one should not overlook the fact that religion is an element that influences social values directly and state policies indirectly.'<sup>397</sup>As with the Gülen movement, 'dialogue', as well as 'friendship' and 'cooperation' are the buzzwords of these proceedings. The conference participants from the AKP such as EU Minister Egemen Bağış and parliamentary speaker Cemil Çiçek promoted themes of regional conflict resolution, democratization and interdependence. Çiçek stated that "Interdependence forces us to search for ways to achieve development in the region. For happiness and prosperity, we have to work together for this aim. Meetings such as the Eurasia Economic Summit pave the way toward mutual understanding."<sup>398</sup> This emphasis on religion and shared cultural and historical values mirrors the AKP's (and Gülen's) approach to regional integration. During interviews with a

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<sup>394</sup> Marmara Group Strategic and Social Research Foundation, 15th Eurasian Economic Summit was Completed Successfully. News. April 10, 2012. Accessed through: <http://www.marmaragrubu.org/15th-eurasian-economic-summit-was-completed-successfully>. on (03/12/15)

<sup>395</sup> Zafer Çağlayan, Turkey's Vibrant Export Trends. *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Volume 10. No. 3. 2011.

<sup>396</sup> Borzou Daragahi, Turkish businesses embrace opportunities in north Africa in spite of Libya risk. *Financial Times*, September 21, 2014. Accessed through: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/ae10eace-10fa-11e4-b116-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3zrzGitc3>. on (10/12/15)

<sup>397</sup> Marmara Group Strategic and Social Research Foundation, 2011, op cit.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

representative of the foundation, a similar self-perception of Turkey, but moreover, the foundation itself was identified; that of a “bridge” to “connect cultures”.<sup>399</sup>

These summits also continually emphasize and discuss education, economic, social and energy development in the region as indispensable for a healthy economy, and high-level security, as ‘the key for the global competitive power.’<sup>400</sup> This underlies the ideological back-bone of the Marmara Foundation (and also the AKP), that “the Future is Eurasia”; their self-declared philosophy driving these economic summits.<sup>401</sup> As such these summits appear to mirror, or at least compliment, the agenda, strategy and world-view of the government that Turkey should be a regional power-house. They primarily focus on Arab countries and voice an ideology of economic development leading to regional peace and stability, the same ideology found to be pervasive in the AKP’s rhetoric. Protocols were signed on Turkish-Iraq relations during the foundations’ workshop in 2015. The Marmara Foundation was also involved in Turkish-Syrian rapprochement prior to the onset of the civil war, attending a cabinet meeting in Hatay in 2010.<sup>402</sup> One of the core roles Marmara Foundation argued they can play in these transnational initiatives is establishing inter-faith dialogue and “soft diplomacy” according to their representative, once again highlighting the similar approach of the foundation and the AKP.<sup>403</sup> In fact, the Marmara Foundation claimed that the government’s initiatives in this sphere were influenced and based upon those of the foundations’. The foundation’s inter-faith dialogue mechanism of yearly multi-faith and multi-ethnic *iftar*, established in 2004, has apparently been assimilated by the AKP as a state practice and the government has become involved in similar inter-faith dialogue meetings.<sup>404</sup>

Within the Marmara Foundation’s activities, there are some clear example of agenda setting and generating new ideas. However, their ideological affinity with the government and business orientation means that they have a clear normative bias in their activities, and once again appear to broadly serve as a tool of elites, and as a non-governmental elite themselves. Yet by hosting foreign delegations, lobbying on economic issues and serving as an international cultural bridge, they are playing a role in foreign relations and in this, represent the increasing currency of think tanks as a legitimate foreign-policy tool under the AKP. Their independence was questionable due to their ties to both government and business, however given the foreign funding restrictions and non-democratic context of Turkey, the Marmara Foundation’s independence in determining their research agenda is notable in and of itself.

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<sup>399</sup> Interview with Hazar Vural, Marmara Foundation, Istanbul, March 10, 2015.

<sup>400</sup> Marmara Group Strategic and Social Research Foundation. 11th Eurasian Economic Summit. News. May 3, 2009. Accessed through: <http://www.marmaragrubu.org/11th-eurasian-economic-summit>. on (24/07/15)

<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

<sup>402</sup> Interview with Vural, op cit.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid.

Furthermore, with their founding pre-dating the AKP, they are one of the few examples of continuous influence from the think tank sector, which in general is seriously lacking in Turkey.

### **3.22 Istanbul Policy Centre**

Founded in 2001, Istanbul Policy Centre is arguably the most active think tank involved in Turkey's foreign affairs. It is affiliated with Sabancı University and began through the university's contact with Bülent Aras from the Foreign Ministry. For an InNGO, they have excellent contact with government officials and work directly on training programmes with young diplomats and ministers, as well as active policy work.<sup>405</sup> Their success can in large part be attributed to Bülent Aras' position within the government and both his and Davutoğlu's agenda of civil-society involvement in foreign affairs. According to interviews, bureaucrats and officials take IPCs policy recommendations seriously, they engage and respond to issues raised and suggest changes in their policy and strategy accordingly.<sup>406</sup> Interestingly, during interviews the government was referred to as a "client", indicating the more formal connections IPC enjoy and the benefits of contract work for institutionalizing civil-society-state influence. IPC stated that they consult with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on everything, from Cyprus to energy issues and transmit their publications and policy recommendations directly to government officials. IPCs motto: 'moving from policy to practice' is demonstrative of their agenda, characteristics and particularly, their difference from most other think tanks in taking an active field role.<sup>407</sup> According to interviews, IPC works very closely with the Ministry of Foreign affairs on their conflict programmes and have many partnerships with international organizations and funding from pro-democracy EU institutions such as Stiftung Mercator. They work alongside both to create and produce analyses of the problems. These reports inform the government and are disseminated through workshops. Their agenda is to improve Turkey's foreign-policy, aid deployment and official development assistance (ODA).<sup>408</sup>

One of their most significant channels of influence is their diplomat training programme. This was initiated through the foreign ministry's conflict resolution department, and the aims are conflict resolution, mediation and regional stability. The programme targets up-and-coming diplomats from post-conflict and pre-conflict countries, as well as Turkish diplomats, and trains them in a number of relevant skills such as responding to conflict, conflict prevention, negotiation and psychology. Although minimal information is available about these projects online due to the internal and sensitive nature of the topic, interviews showed two important

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<sup>405</sup> Interview with Sazak, op cit.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid.

<sup>408</sup> Interview with Aueven Woods, IPC, Istanbul, February 11, 2015.

features which should be highlighted. Firstly, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is seeking out non-state actor advice and assistance on sensitive diplomatic issues, and secondly, IPC is creating a network of diplomats familiar with their (the Turkish) approach to conflict resolution, further publicizing and legitimizing Turkey's soft-power and contributing to the import of the Turkish model to the region. IPC have worked in creating similar non-state networks for the purpose of conflict resolution such as with Syria. Directly after the onset of the civil war, IPC ran a three-day workshop hosting Syrian activists, journalists, artists and leaders to generate ideas of a post-Assad Syria. Such workshops represent an important civil-society initiative to engage with international non-state actors and find new avenues for conflict resolution.<sup>409</sup> Once again such activities were curtailed when the full nature of the crisis became clear, illustrative of the limits of influence for non-state actors and explanatory of IPCs focus on post-conflict reconstruction.

The IPC specializes in Turkey's Civilian Capacity (CIVCAP) in foreign aid relations. CIVCAP is a research project coordinated by the UN which compiles data on Turkey's total capacity as a humanitarian actor, detailing the activities of both the government and NGOs. According to interviews, the IPCs motivation for joining this initiative was that although NGOs and the state have been involved in such work since the 1990s, there has been little long-term planning, communication or coordination within or between NGOs and the state: simply working on a needs-based approach. Sazak described Turkey's CIVCAP agenda as sending the "best and the brightest" to conflict zones for training programmes, working with doctors, lawyers, judges and the police force, as well as more generally contributing to infrastructure building and addressing issues of political inclusion. Onur Sazak, IPCs research and academic affairs manager, described CIVCAP and their position between the UN, the Turkish government and recipient countries as a "valuable bridge, or buffer", which is a consistent self-perception discourse of think tanks.<sup>410</sup>

With CIVCAP, IPC reports directly back to the government and the UN on the issues which arise during field work, with detailed road maps and needs provided. Onur Sazak stated during interviews that this is their most tangible and substantive success in influencing government policy. He stated that prior to the IPCs participation in this project, inter-departmental coordination was very low and there was a lack of knowledge about the various international aid projects pursued by different departments. According to Sazak, "our work woke people up", and CIVCAP was picked up at the ministry level and is now "like a catch phrase".<sup>411</sup> Following IPCs work, the Foreign Ministry are reportedly discussing CIVCAP, questioning how Turkey can better use its resources, which new areas it can expand into and most of all,

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<sup>409</sup> Interview with Sazak, op cit.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid.

debating the bilateral strategy generally pursued by the government as opposed to the multi-lateral strategy proposed by IPC.<sup>412</sup> Sazak explained their focus on multi-lateral and structured engagement as a method by which to reduce the influence of cultural and ethnic ties on foreign relations to better determine the most systematic and efficient use of resources.<sup>413</sup>

They have worked closely with a network of government officials and NGO representatives to determine how decisions are made: the type and amount of aid to the design and deployment of civilian capacity. This project will not be detailed fully as it is confined to Turkey's engagement in Somalia and Afghanistan so far, however it is important to note insofar as it is indicative of the growing active involvement of think tanks in foreign affairs, demonstrating the future potential of NGO-state coordination in international aid. Furthermore, it is one of the only examples of a Turkish think tank offering direct policy assistance and advice on humanitarian aid, something that has usually been controlled dually by TIKA/ AFAD and individually by Turkish donors such as Kimse Yok Mu and IHH. This is the first example of a collaborative project aimed at creating across-the-board policy protocols, transparent decision-making and institutionalized systems and regulations to monitor Turkey's development assistance. It actively encourages greater collaboration with NGOs as a 'domestic resource' as described by the team, indicative of one of the core themes of this chapter, that even independent organizations are largely perceived and used as a foreign-policy tool rather than an autonomous actor in foreign relations.<sup>414</sup> Given IPCs additional role in agenda setting, communication and networking, this is not as limiting as it may appear however and they are closer than any other Turkish think tank in playing the ideal role ascribed to them.

The language of civilian capacity now used by government officials and is an indicator of the growing relationship between the AKP and think tanks such as IPC. Although they tend to refer to CIVCAP as "global development diplomacy efforts" or "development cooperation efforts" according to IPC, this discourse and agenda is becoming prevalent among governmental actors. Furthermore, the CIVCAP initiative added to the legitimacy and growing image of Turkey as a global donor rather than recipient of aid: something which has contributed greatly to Turkey's national image and continues to influence its behaviour in the international community. In IPCs activities and research on development in MENA, there appears to be a strong focus on Turkey as the most appropriate partner, as opposed to 'traditional donors'; based on 'common values and interests'. This mirrors, and in fact, pre-dates the governments' discourse of Turkey as the ideal humanitarian diplomat for the region based on its history and identity.<sup>415</sup> The IPC and the AKP both promote NGOs' investment

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<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

<sup>414</sup> Tery Murphy and Onur Sazak, *Turkey's Civilian Capacity in Post-conflict Reconstruction*. Istanbul Policy Center, Sabanci University, 2012, p.4.

<sup>415</sup> Murphy and Sazak, *op cit*, p.vi.



and ‘constructive involvement’ in the region, apparently based on their greater capacity to understand and deal directly with people in need.<sup>416</sup>

For an InNGO, IPC enjoys a particularly constructive relationship with the AKP. By focussing largely on aid capacity and international development, the IPC skirts around topics which would compel them to be critical of the state. Civil-society groups appear to be broadly in agreement with Turkey’s growing role as an international donor and there is a vacuum for research focussed on greater collaboration and coordination between these groups, something IPC research is beginning to fill. Auveen Woods from IPC highlighted the lack of trust and suspicion between these groups inhibiting coordination, which the IPC is attempting to break down.<sup>417</sup> Interestingly, the IPCs activities in Africa reveal a kind of circular influence between civil-society and the government. First, aid organizations entered, creating the vision and motivation for government involvement, which was subsequently followed up once more by a civil-society group, now aiming at forging coordination and structure in the activities of these groups.<sup>418</sup> This intricate network of influence and practice is revealing of the complexity of Turkey’s modern foreign relations.

### **3.3 Business NGOs**

The business community has been a strong force behind the expansion of Turkey’s think tank culture. Since the 1960s, think tanks have been used by the business community as a legitimate channel for policy influence, with a number of business-affiliated organizations emerging such as the Economic Development Foundation (IKV), Turkey’s first think tank, TESEV (Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation), TEPAV (Economic and Policy Research Institute) of TOBB and TÜSIADs Foreign Relations Forum. Nevertheless, given this is an entrepreneurial class with access to large funds, business funded think tanks remain relatively few in number. This may be due to big business’ reluctance to interfere in high politics for fear of legal and financial attack from the state and their self-preservationist stance based on economic interests. Although they have been very involved in international lobbying in terms of EU accession, this was an issue of broad national agreement. Controversial regional policies have not attracted much attention from business and the two think tanks discussed in this section have limited themselves to public opinion surveys, some regional democratization projects and domestic demilitarization, none of which contentious topics for the government.

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<sup>416</sup> Nabatte Proscovia. Turkey Advises Africa on Principle of Equal Partnership and Mutual Benefit. *Makerere University News Portal*. October 2, 2015. Accessed through: <http://news.mak.ac.ug/2015/10/turkey-advises-africa-principle-equal-partnership-and-mutual-benefit>. on (11/02/16)

<sup>417</sup> Interview with Woods, op cit.

<sup>418</sup> Interview with Serhat Guvenc, Kadir Has University, Istanbul, February 9, 2015.

Despite this, various BNGOs have benefited from, and at times spurred on, the AKP's efforts at economic integration and rapprochement with the Middle East such as TEPAV. Equally the foreign-policy of the AKP has also spurred on non-state actors to pursue their own initiatives; particularly visible in civil-society led business/ conflict resolution efforts such as TEPAV's Industry for Peace project in Palestine, and the Marmara Foundations leadership of the annual Eurasian Economic Summit. This collaboration between think tanks and the business sector underlies government efforts to expand regional markets, conclude trade agreements and better political relations. As such, a common level of consent appears apparent between think tanks, business and the AKP; whose foreign-policy style is contingent upon the use of such economic diplomacy in Turkey's relations with the Middle East.

### 3.31 TÜSIAD Foreign-policy Forum

TÜSIAD Foreign-policy Forum was established in 2002 in collaboration with Boğaziçi University and the Brookings Institute as a channel through which TÜSIAD could contribute to the formation of foreign-policy on behalf of the Turkish private sector, from the perspective of investment and trade strategies.<sup>419</sup> The international affiliation of this forum is of note here and is reflected in their agenda and output. Their general agenda as described by their director Hakan Yilmaz is pro-EU, western and liberal; focussing on the EU and the US.<sup>420</sup> However Turkish and US foreign-policy towards the Middle East have also become a focal point in recent years and conferences as well as publications have been organized to discuss regional developments.<sup>421</sup> They have been a proponent of 'zero problems' and multidimension foreign-policy, attempting to balance Turkey's growing relations with the Middle East with historic relations with the West and Israel. Yet unlike GNGOs who also publicize this foreign-policy orientation, the forum has taken a critical stance of how this policy has been enacted in isolating and threatening western powers. Equally, their content appears supportive of the Turkish model paradigm and Turkey as a regional mediator, but they have criticized the AKP's stance towards Israel as inhibiting Turkey's development.

TÜSIAD Foreign-policy Forum was conceived of to communicate and inform the public of the Annan plan. Its activities as a mediator and advocate for resolution with Cyprus means that the Forum has taken on a more active role in providing direct foreign-policy input than any

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<sup>419</sup> TÜSIAD to help foreign-policy making. *Hurriyet Daily News*, September 25, 2002. Accessed through:

<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/TÜSIAD-to-help-foreign-policy-making.aspx?pageID=438&n=TÜSIAD-to-help-foreign-policy-making-2002-09-25> on (11/01/16)

<sup>420</sup> Interview with Yilmaz, op cit.

<sup>421</sup> Turkish Industry and Business Association. TÜSIAD–Boğaziçi University Foreign-policy Forum organized a conference on the Middle East Policy of the USA. April 16, 2013. Accessed through: <http://www.TÜSIAD.org/information-center/education-for-21st-century-skills--the-content-and-methods-of-education-conference/blog/TÜSIADBogazici-university-foreign-policy-forum-dpf-organized-a-conference-on-the-middle-east-policy-of-the-usa/> on (11/01/16)

other think tank examined in this chapter. This may be due to their connections with business, as well as TÜSIADs long history of EU accession lobbying both domestically and in Brussels. In addition to their lobbying activities, as with other think tanks they organize talks, publish working papers, conferences and agendas. Hakan Yilmaz said during interviews that the Forum holds annual meetings which sets their agenda for the year based on contemporary issues, stating that “The idea is to produce new ideas for sounder Turkish foreign-policy, to listen to people with whom Turkey has foreign-policy problems; Israel for example, also Greece and Armenia. The idea is to listen to their point of view.”<sup>422</sup> Although such an approach can be identified in the activities of other organizations such as Marmara Foundation, Yilmaz’s emphasis on listening and understanding the ‘others’ point of view is unique insofar as there was no mention of Turkey’s ‘national interest’, or else the active insertion of the organizations’ agenda into the meeting. That said, there are underlying interests which arguably drive the Forum’s approach to conflict resolution with Greece and Armenia, firstly business interests related to EU accession and Cyprus, as well as interest in presenting Turkey as a stable and favourable destination for foreign investment.

That said, the agenda of open dialogue and discussion described by Yilmaz, particularly in allowing the voices of conflicting actors to be heard, differs both from business and traditional think tank engagement indicating that there are normative values inscribed in this organization’s activities. They also work on the European Union’s Common Security and Defense Policy and providing roadmaps for policy action however, which is a form of direct lobbying more common amongst business associations. As with all think tanks, the Forums events are attended by government officials, particularly from the foreign ministry, academics and other civil-society representatives. Notably however, Yilmaz said that their events are often attended by nationalist civil-society groups who come to protest their discussion on contentious issues such as Armenia and Cyprus, contributing to growing public debate.<sup>423</sup> This is indicative of the more controversial stance taken by the Forum as no other think tank has caused such public conflict, usually due to a self-preservationist non-confrontational agenda. This can be ascribed to the relatively high levels of financial autonomy and institutional support TÜSIAD benefit from, as well as their ties to Boğaziçi University which is known for its oppositional and dissident politics. That said, given TÜSIADs substantial power and networks, the Forum was perhaps one of the least visible think tanks in the public sphere, indicating either that their role in public communication and agenda setting is minimal, or that they favour behind-the-scenes lobbying.

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<sup>422</sup> Interview with Yilmaz, op cit.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid.

One area where the Forum has taken a visible public stance was on the Mavi Marmara crisis. Their swift engagement in this issue is reflective of their pro-US agenda, as well as trade and investment concerns. The Forum hosted a panel discussion at Boğaziçi University with attendance from Israeli academics, media figures and the former director-general of the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs who commented on the growing perception of Turkey in Israel as hostile to the United States, Europe and Israel. The panel also discussed issues of Turkish foreign-policy towards Iran, as well as tourism decline between Turkey and Israel.<sup>424</sup> Occurring just five months after the Mavi Marmara incident, this was one of the first efforts at dialogue and reconciliation of its kind. Particularly, the Forums efforts were against the growing tide of anti-Israeli public opinion, as well as against populist rhetoric from the ruling AKP. By providing a public forum of debate and particularly focussing on unheard voices critical of the governments' reaction to this event, as well as to the flotilla in the first place, TÜSIAD contributed to continuing public debate on Turkish-Israeli relations, particularly on Turkey's role in the deterioration which is not a popular or prevalent narrative in Turkish society. This stands as one of the few examples of think tanks generating critical ideas and interestingly, utilizing the government's own hegemonic discourses on zero problems and soft-power to hold them to account for foreign-policy decisions.

As with many of the other organizations discussed in this thesis, TÜSIAD Foreign-policy Forum follows a driving ideology of economic integration as a method of ensuring regional peace and stability. Despite their focus on the EU and the US, the Forum has expanded its agenda in recent years, hosting speakers on Egypt, the Arab Spring, Syria and the Islamic State. In terms of the influence of such talks, as well as the aforementioned panels on Israel and Armenia, Yilmaz stated that "If there is a good speaker offering them a good framework it shapes the minds. There is certainly an influence... TÜSIAD uses people as conveyer belts, to communicate a message."<sup>425</sup> This supports the underlying themes of this chapter: that think tanks are influential in often intangible ways, shaping public opinion, sparking debate and playing a communicative role. While the Forum's generally low public visibility indicates that this is not a primary feature of their activities, their activities surrounding the Annan plan, critical scholarship and direct policy advocacy does indicate that they are successfully playing a role as an independent source of information and ideas in TFP.

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<sup>424</sup> Israeli figures criticize Turkish foreign-policy, Hurriyet Daily News. October 25, 2010. Accessed through: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/default.aspx?pageid=438&n=turkish-foreign-policy-criticized-over-israel-iran-policies-2010-10-25> on (07/07/15)

<sup>425</sup> Ibid.

### 3.32 Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV)

TEPAV's main activities have already been detailed extensively in chapter three on business associations. As such, I will briefly discuss their aims and agenda here, particularly in relation to their economic agenda and funding from TOBB. The institution was established in 2004 by a group of academics, bureaucrats and businessmen who 'believe in the power of knowledge and ideas in shaping Turkey's future.'<sup>426</sup> TEPAV are non-partisan and non-profit, however their funding from TOBB as well as their main activity, the Industry for Peace Initiative, implies that behind their agenda of economic and political development lies an element of profit-seeking behaviour.

Their development activities in Palestine as discussed in chapter three reflect a dual economic interest and ethical interest in conflict resolution – an agenda consistently identified within the government's own development activities abroad. Like many of the organizations examined here, TEPAV have a strong focus on regional stability, economic development and Turkey's foreign relations. Regarding stability, TEPAV's approach is reflective of theories and practices of track II diplomacy; stating that the stability institute was established 'with the belief that stability is too important to be resigned to the hands of government and society alone.'<sup>427</sup> This approach seems to have led TEPAV to concentrate on civil-society involvement in furthering trade, cultural and linguistic ties with Turkey's region. They view civil-society's role here as both an informer and a communicator of policies and practices impacting upon stability. They, like TÜSİAD Foreign-policy Forum, have a much stronger Western focus than the other organizations examined here. This is due to the economic interests behind the organization and also due to EU funding which has driven them to be a strong advocate of the AKP's multidimensional foreign-policy paradigm, seeking to maintain a balance in Turkey's expanding regional relations.<sup>428</sup>

Although they have broadly taken a non-confrontational approach to foreign-policy-making, a notable exception was found in TEPAV's policy briefs and approach to the challenges of the Arab Spring. TEPAV have taken a much more nuanced and reserved approach towards Turkey's new regional engagement. Like TÜSİAD Foreign-policy Forum, they have advised against what analysts and interviewees seemingly view as Turkey's meddling in regional affairs and the transition to coercive instruments, and have adopted a more status quo foreign-policy orientation of neutrality and non-intervention.<sup>429</sup> Although not opposed to Turkey's

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<sup>426</sup> The Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey. About. Accessed through: <http://www.tepav.org.tr/en/html/249/About/> on (11/10/15).

<sup>427</sup> Ibid.

<sup>428</sup> The Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey. Projects. Accessed through: <http://www.tepav.org.tr/en/proje/durum/g/devam> on (10/10/15).

<sup>429</sup> S.Kardas. From zero problems to leading the change: making sense of transformation in Turkey's regional policy. *Turkish Foreign-policy Briefs, TEPAV* (2012). p.4.

‘desire to help the domestic transformation’ during the Arab Spring, TEPAV analyst Şaban Kardaş, is critical of Turkey’s ability to manage this crisis or to shape a new regional order in MENA: highlighting the lack of knowledge about Middle Eastern affairs, as well as limited linguistic and societal connections as the main limitation. Kardaş also raises limits on soft-power resources for post-conflict reconstruction and economic development as limitations.<sup>430</sup>

Both these criticisms imply that Turkey’s currently flawed coercive role in the Middle East could have been rectified and expanded by utilizing civil-society resources. Kardaş notes in 2011 that civil-society initiatives in the spheres of good governance and the ‘Turkish model’ were already developing in the region.<sup>431</sup> In 2011, TEPAV Director Güven Sak stated that Turkey’s ambition to become a regional power is limited without greater knowledge of the region and having experts in the field. This is the apparent aim of TOBB ETUs growing linguistics programmes according to Sak; to improve Turkey’s capacity to become a ‘regional power’.<sup>432</sup> TEPAV already has a Russian Center aimed at improving economic and societal ties between Turkey and the Russian speaking world, and is in the process of establishing a similar program on Arabic. The focus of these linguistic programs appears to be trade and this was the main topic discussed during TEPAV’s conference on Russian Language Education in Turkey, illustrating the institutes’ view and activities towards regional integration as based upon mutual understanding and societal networks.<sup>433</sup> Although the current political climate is not conducive to such initiatives, at the time such activities were being pursued by both the government and civil-society.

Like almost all the business interest driven organizations discussed here, TEPAV has taken an active interest in the Israel-Palestine conflict as existing TFP is viewed as damaging to Turkey’s relations with the West and thus, Turkey’s role as a regional hegemon. TEPAV’s involvement in the Palestinian crisis and broadly successful attempts to establish itself as a mediator in this conflict are worthy of note once again here. Although their main project has been discussed, TEPAV also run numerous round-tables and conferences to this end. They hosted the Palestinian Ambassador to Turkey, Nebil Maoruf, as well as various civil-society representatives from Turkey and the US and proposed alternative solutions and US policies towards Israel.<sup>434</sup> They ran similar initiatives early on in the Syrian crisis, whilst Turkey was still involved in negotiations with Assad. The limited time scale of these initiatives is

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<sup>430</sup> Ibid

<sup>431</sup> Kardaş., op cit. p.7.

<sup>432</sup> TEPAV Director Sak: "You cannot become a regional power if you do not know your neighbors well". News. October 25, 2010. Accessed through:  
<http://www.tepav.org.tr/en/haberler/s/1739> on (11/10/15).

<sup>433</sup> Ibid.

<sup>434</sup> TEPAV. Israel-Palestine Conflict on TEPAV’s Agenda. News. November 19, 2012. Accessed through:  
<http://www.tepav.org.tr/en/haberler/s/3261> on (11/10/15).

indicative that TEPAV perceive a role for civil-society dialogue only at certain stages of a crisis when normalization is still possible.<sup>435</sup> Like USAK and SETA, TEPAV analysts have a strong media presence, however tend to write for more critical outlets such as *Hürriyet Daily News* and *Biyanet* indicating they do not merely play a communicative role on behalf of government elites. TEPAVs motto: 'The light of truth emerges from a clash of ideas', is salient and indicative of their self-perception in the critical role think tanks can play. TEPAV, and think tanks with strong business backing in general, appear to have a much greater capacity than InNGOs and especially GNGOs to generate new ideas. Whilst it does not appear that the necessary pluralism of ideas is currently being voiced by Turkish think tanks, this is due to constraints upon them by the relatively un-democratic political environment of Turkey.

#### **4. The Limits of Influence**

Although this thesis aims at identifying instances of influence on either specific policy decisions or more generally upon foreign relations, there is no identifiable rule to be derived from this research. Think tanks' influence varies based on a wide range of factors such as public interest, state authority, organization size and structure; the list is endless. Furthermore, demonstrating influence, both from a research perspective and from the think tanks themselves is extremely difficult. The normative impact of ideas and research upon the wide constellation of the decision-making process cannot be directly measured. Rather, what can be used as indicators of influence is state discourse, media publicity and tangible results (such as agreements, policies or events) that have emerged from think tank led practices as has been discussed in the previous sections. However, given the critique throughout, of think tanks as an elite tool for legitimizing and publicizing foreign-policy decisions, even this cannot be said to indicate 'influence'. The issues raised regarding the independence of think tanks' research, the patrimonialism and lack of institutionalized ties all prevent think tanks from playing the 'ideal' role laid out in section two. As such, this section will detail the domestic limitations inhibiting the autonomy and influence of think tanks in Turkey.

In both theoretical and practical terms, it is very difficult to measure the reality of think tanks' influence. Foreign-policy institutes, compared with Islamic NGOs, have a particularly high opinion of themselves. Particularly those close to the government such as SETA and to a lesser degree, USAK, tend to overplay their role. The divide between perception and reality inhibits research. The self-perceived policy impact of these organizations has been discussed by Aras and Toktaş discusses this issue in relations to ORSAM and SETAs role in Turkey's Northern

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<sup>435</sup> TEPAV. Recent Developments in Syria Discussed at TEPAV. News, April 5, 2011. Accessed through: <http://www.tepav.org.tr/en/haberler/s/2145> on (11/10/15).

Iraqi policy.<sup>436</sup> There is a normative basis for such exaggeration as experts depict the political environment they wish to work in and officials wish to appear more open to societal involvement than they are to portray a more open, pluralistic and democratic environment when in fact the enduring closed nature of the bureaucracy and broader political culture in Turkey inhibits influence to a significant degree. That said, many of the institutes interviewed, particularly TESEV and TEPAV if anything underplayed their influence. I believe this to be due to the changing political environment and increasing authoritarianism experienced by CSOs in Turkey since 2010. Furthermore, and as will be touch upon further in the conclusion, the challenges raised by the Arab Spring and the return to coercive power has further marginalized think tanks as they are most active and able during rapprochement efforts and post-conflict situations.

Even in their self-perception, think tanks were often viewed as merely a vehicle to provide access to decision-makers, or a tool, rather than autonomous non-state actors producing new ideas. Funding appears to be one of the critical issues here, limiting their capacity and restricting their function to serving the interests of donors. Assessing the impact of funding was extremely difficult due to a lack of transparency regarding sources. Many, particularly GNGOs, rely almost exclusively on government grants and contracts. Funding issues clearly compromise the independence and integrity of these institutions and see them playing the role of facilitator and enabler for the government rather than their ideal role in providing objective input and new ideas. However, such formal connections also mean that think tank staff attain a more privileged position of access into official decision-making circles. Consequently, this analysis is complex. This thesis set out to identify the role and influence of civil-society organizations, not to assess their validity as such. The official and informal connections between organizations such as ORSAM and the Foreign Office based on funding, while compromising their independence, also allows them to play a more influential role. Good relations with the government is a necessity within the relatively un-democratic context of Turkish politics in order for institutions to remain active and free. During interviews and in research, there were no documented cases in which the Foreign Office, or any member of the government, sought to directly intervene in the research or activities of think tanks. That said, issues of self-censorship prevail and think tanks were found to tailor their research based on governmental needs, which is a particularly pressing concern given the competitive nature of public (government) funding.

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<sup>436</sup> B.Aras and S.Toktaş, (2009), Türkiye Ulusal Güvenlik Kültürünün Yapımında Araştırma Merkezlerinin Rolü ve Etkisi (The Role and Impact of Research Centers in the Making of National Security Cultures of Turkey). Paper presented at III.Uluslararası İlişkiler Çalışmaları ve Eğitimi Kongresi, 28-30 May, KTÜ, Trabzon.



Although there have been few closures of think tanks based on their limited voicing of an oppositional agenda, such attempts have been made against media outlets (Koza-Ipek), charities (Kimse Yok Mu) and businesses in Turkey. Informal personal relations remain a prevalent determining factor of the influence of think tanks in Turkey. Such a system endangers think tank culture, as well as democracy, and further entrenches nepotism and patronage networks. In response to the closure of ASAM, TEPAV's director, Güven Sak, stated that: "Independence has no guarantee in Turkey. It entirely depends on personal relations," highlighting the instability faced by Turkish institutes.<sup>437</sup> Such an insecure socio-political context necessarily has an impact on the research and independence of think tanks, who fear marginalization and financial attacks should they come head-to-head with the government. Particularly for organizations involved in the Kurdish issues or Gülen affiliated groups, this is a pressing concern. InNGOs have reported threatening phone calls regarding their funding (linking this to terrorism), unsubstantiated threats regarding tax-evasion, and even in one case related to me during a meeting with Research Turkey, threats of bombing their Istanbul offices.<sup>438</sup> Moreover, the 'independence' of even independent think tanks must be questioned as they rely on interest and pressure groups or donors meaning that their agenda is linked, if not controlled by external sources.

A further issue related to funding is that of accountability and transparency. Despite there being public disclosure requirements regarding think tanks in Turkey, there remains a remarkable lack of transparency for some institutions as to where funds come from. This contributes to growing tensions in Turkey regarding foreign funding and allows think tanks to be targeted and discredited as foreign agents working for 'secret powers'.<sup>439</sup> A recent case raised against TESEV is exemplary of this. TESEV has been very active in the demilitarization process, however their role in this and validity of the democratization process has been called into question based on their receipt of foreign funds from George Soros, with the director of the Social Transparency Movement Association declaring that "Turkey is under siege."<sup>440</sup> Notably, TESEV is one of the few organizations clear on their funding. However, the general lack of transparency and accountability Turkey's political culture as well as the Gülen issue is eroding the legitimacy and potential of think tanks. Greater public disclosure would offer a solution to this as the public could better evaluate the various forces influencing

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<sup>437</sup> M.Oğuz, ASAM closure making think tanks think harder. *Hurriyet Daily News*, December 22, 2008. Accessed through: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/asam-closure-making-think-tanks-think-harder-10417056> on (09/10/15).

<sup>438</sup> Email correspondence Research Turkey, name withheld.

<sup>439</sup> See for example M.Yıldırım, "Project Democracy": Sivil Örümcenin Ağında, 6th Edition, (Ankara: Ulusdağı Yayınları, 2005); and Güler Kömürcü, "Karanlık Savaşın Karanlık Stratejistleri (Dark Strategists of the Dark War), May 11, 2004.

<sup>440</sup> I.Geray, 'Does Foreign Funding Make NGOs into Puppets?'. Global Policy Forum, October 11, 2006.

Accessed through: <https://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/176/31492.html> on (09/10/15)

their government, contributing to the legitimacy of think tanks' role in policy formation. As such, funding issues are limiting the influence of think tanks in a variety of ways, not only in directing their research agenda and leading to self-censorship, but also in causing public distrust in these institutions. Finally, unlike think tanks in the US and UK, most Turkish think tanks do not receive tax-exempt status as non-profits. This is limiting in terms of private donations and reflective of the unstable status these institutions have under Turkish law.

Turkish think tanks have not yet evolved institutionally to fulfil their ideal role. This is in large part due to the domestic political environment, however also due to funding limitations, lack of experience and structure compared to their American and European equivalents. Furthermore, as argued by a USAK representative, it is difficult to have a truly civil-society in Turkey due to the strong state tradition.<sup>441</sup> The prevailing dominance of the strong state tradition in Turkey impacts upon the activities and influence of think tanks, as these institutes are more able to influence policy in weak or decentralized states.<sup>442</sup> High levels of centralization within the AKP would normally indicate limited space for influence from external policy factors.<sup>443</sup> That said, in the case of Turkey it was found that the power of singular decision-makers (Erdoğan and Davutoğlu during his time as foreign minister) and their active integration of think tanks during the first two terms for policy advice and intellectual legitimacy did leave room for some input. Yet this influence was not consistently institutionalized, but often based on informal connections and political will.

Although there has been a clear multiplication of the actors visible in the decision-making process, think tanks being the most vocal group within this new visibility, there remains issues in how these institutes influence policy, to what effect and with what vested interests. There has certainly been an invigoration in civil-society-government relations and think tanks enjoy access to, and by extension, influence over, high-level decision-makers. Yet some have argued that think tanks provide a 'government in exile' where various un-elected or retired political officials can seek to influence policy. This, as well as the aforementioned 'revolving door' issue, raise issues that think tanks represent either a new elite in policy-making, or else simple a tool. While examples were found of think tanks transgressing the domestic limitations mentioned above and playing an ideal role generating new ideas, communicating to publics and government, setting the agenda and informing with scientific research, these cases were few and far between, showing the limits of influence on think tanks influence on foreign relations. So how now to understand think tanks' role? The following and final section

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<sup>441</sup> Interview with Yegin, op cit.

<sup>442</sup> A.Longhini. 2013. The role and the influence of think tanks on the policy-making process in Europe.

<sup>443</sup> Abelson, 2002, op cit.

explores when and how think tanks can have an influence over foreign relations despite the limitations mentioned above.

## **5. Conclusions**

This chapter has determined that, unlike business associations with their direct channels of influence and impact on economic policy, the strength of Turkish think tanks was in constructing the intellectual foundations of Turkey's image as a model democracy and regional soft-power. By (re)producing, legitimizing and disseminating policy practices based on Turkey's image as a soft-power, mediator in regional conflicts, democratizing force and champion of civil-society in the Middle East, think tanks were found to have a normative discursive rather than direct policy influence: although some examples of direct influence were found through exploring their state-sanctioned mediation initiatives. This chapter contributes to the broader arguments made in this thesis regarding what is 'new' in TFP being the strategies, outlook and tools, with a strong empirical contribution detailing how Turkey's changing relations and identity within the Middle East was constructed, legitimized and publicized both domestically and to the international community through think tanks' publications, workshops, media activism and policy input.

Turkey's changing foreign-policy orientation under the AKP provided an opportune moment for think tanks' input which is why the Middle East is such an interesting case study for this research. Particularly in times of domestic and regional political transformation (or pre- and post-conflict situations, as discussed in the previous chapter on business associations), think tanks were found to have been called upon for expert advice, used as a communicative mediator with publics and to generate new ideas and provide continuity of expertise and knowledge. Think tanks have proliferated worldwide since the end of the Cold War. Turkey's fledgling think tank culture has been emerging since the 1960s, however was energized under the AKP. This is for various reasons, not least of which political liberalization and a lessening on the legal restrictions on freedom of association and expression in the early 2000s. The genesis of think tanks was prefixed on economic and political changes preceding the AKP era however. Turkey's increasing relations with the EU, the emergence of pioneering (if limited) organizations such as the IKV and growing needs from the business community for channels such as think tanks through which to legitimately communicate their ideas and interests to government, and underlying this, democratization and desecuritization, all contributed to the construction of a political climate conducive to think tanks' influence. The limits of influence discussed in the final section once again confirming the core conditions needed for impact being political will, interest alignment, autonomy and capacity.

While limited instances of direct impact on foreign-policy were identified during this research for this chapter, it has been argued that think tanks have a broader influence on the policy environment, and moreover, that this is due to their limited aims and alternative methods rather than necessarily incapacity or differential conditions of impact when compared to business associations or faith-based NGOs. In producing research and stimulating public debate on issues such as civilian capacity in the case of IPC, which has now been internalized as a foreign-policy discourse and practice under the AKP, think tanks have an atmospheric influence. Moreover, think tanks have contributed in entrenching governmental policy lexicon regarding soft-power and the Turkish model, which was the basis of Turkey's Middle East policy until 2013. In their formation and promotion of this discourse, they operate as gatekeepers for the AKP's foreign-policy system. The reason discourse has been focused on here as the most important change in TFP is that in actuality, the AKP was not successful in its foreign-policy agenda to become a regional hegemon, in its 'zero problems' paradigm or in its exercise of soft-power. Yet the hype surrounding the Turkey's new foreign-policy endured long after its limited power capabilities were revealed, showing the discursive hegemony of the AKP as influenced, legitimized and disseminated by think tanks. Think tanks' publications, analysis and statements were a significant tool in the promotion and diffusion of this discourse which raises questions regarding their autonomy, independence and critical thinking capacity and reveals the power interests underlying supposedly objective research. There are significant institutional and cultural factors affecting opportunities for policy influence in Turkey and inhibiting the 'independence' and influence of these institution however.

The plethora of environmental factors that mediate think tanks' influence are ever changing, meaning determining a direct relationship between input and output was not possible. That said, in examining the interests, discourses and research input of think tanks, a broad relationship or correspondence was found between the intellectual framework of TFP under the AKP and the policy advice offered by think tanks which is sufficient to support the claims made in the introduction to this chapter, and more broadly in this thesis that civil-society was indeed influencing the broader strategies, outlook and tools of foreign relations, if not directly impacting on specific moments of foreign-policy. The data discussed above revealed a few main findings. Firstly, that there were themes and policy suggestions produced by the think tank sector in Turkey that have manifested in recent trends in TFP. Establishing a direct link between this input and output was not possible however the foreign-policy approach of 'soft-power', 'diplomacy' and 'democracy promotion' adopted towards the Middle East under the AKP had strong similarities to the policy research and output of think tanks. Secondly, a relationship between think tanks and other domestic sources of influence was identified. The rise of think tanks as a source of information and a bridge and a proxy for publics, media and

policy has spurred increasing domestic input on foreign-policy issues. Some of this is partisan and interest-based, but that does not mean it is not still a democratic development with think tanks reflecting a variety of influences from the domestic sphere. Thirdly, like business associations, think tanks are most active at times of normalization and post-conflict reconciliation, both due to the political opening/ will and need for expert advice as well as greater public debate. Finally, the main transformations that can be identified during the AKP period is think tanks' transition from an informative to an active role. I argue that this remains a transitional period and that the influence of think tanks in Turkey and the formation of a strong think tank culture is restrained by the numerous funding, institutional and political factors discussed above.

This chapter discussed the history and evolution of think tank culture and separated think tanks by type based on their interests, funding and alliances: government-affiliated (GNGO), business-affiliated (BNGO) and independent or quasi-independent (InNGO). It explained the different types using empirical information from their agenda, identity, research and funding which provides a detailed picture of the complex situation of 'independence' for Turkish think tanks. One conclusion to be drawn from these model types is that non-profit driven and partisan think tanks are still able to shape the debate and that there was not a distinct difference in research agendas between these organizations, despite their contrasting motivations. However, party-affiliated think tanks have been able to dominate, in part due to their funding but also due to their close links with conservative segments of government and society, supporting the conditions identified throughout regarding interest alignment and access to decision-makers being core conditions of influence. Under the AKP, this has led to a centre-right monopolization of the civic space available to non-state actors. However, government representatives are utilizing research from a variety of think tanks, not just GNGOs, indicating that this trend is fluid and can be altered given the right political environment and financing for InNGOs. Regardless of the dominance of GNGOs, the emergence of hundreds of think tanks over the past few decades represents a new plurality of voices.

Under pluralist theories, think tanks are brokers of ideas, and serve as a bridge between ideas and action. Soft-power, mediation and conflict resolution, as well as democratization and good governance, have become the central discourses and practices in Turkey's regional engagement. I argued here that think tanks contributed to the intellectual framework and legitimacy behind such activities, as well as providing the support and track II diplomacy needed to enhance Turkey's regional role. They have served as a catalyst for ideas and action and have set the agenda in numerous ways: mobilizing domestic and foreign publics in support of normalization efforts such as with Israel, engaging with conflicting ethnic groups such as Turkmens in Iraq and the KRG, and generating/ publicizing the idea of rapprochement and Turkey as a 'central power'. This is not an interest-free activity though, and think tanks' self-

perception as an objective and independent policy community should be interrogated. In publicizing and legitimizing governmental foreign-policy discourses, think tanks serve the needs of political and economic elites. That said, they also have a vested interest in democracy as they need certain standards to function and express their views. Think tanks have benefited from changes in Turkey's domestic environment, and there is an interconnected relationship between the political and economic interests of think tanks and their promotion of the core tenants of TFP: soft-power and the Turkish model.

One of the most significant transformations in Turkey's think tank sector was identified as the transition from a purely informative role, to an active one, engaging in education, training, capacity building, networking and serving as a liaison between various governmental and non-governmental organizations. Although the regular meetings, roundtables, conferences, workshops and seminars hosted by think tanks and attended by politicians, diplomats, bureaucrats, practitioners and experts often have no tangible results: it is argued that they are one of the formative aspects of the social context in which policy is formed. The AKP, more than any other Turkish government, has proved themselves responsive to the interaction and information offered by such activities. Although I would not go so far as to argue that think tanks play a key role in foreign relations; they do play an important one - generating the policy recommendations which influence policy as 'ideas brokers', as well as acting as 'communications brokers' - influencing the domestic and international environment in which policy is shaped and implemented, and in entrenching a new lexicon in TFP that focuses on 'diplomacy', 'soft-power' and 'democracy' promotion. In the research and publications analysed, all the think tanks involved in Middle Eastern relations, even GNGOs, advocate these approaches as opposed to the security-centric military power as advocated by older western-facing institutions such as the Foreign-policy Institute. There are obvious and strong similarities in the foreign-policy style of the AKP showing the link between policy research and policy outputs.

Ultimately, the final decision on foreign 'policy' remains in the hands of the policy elite in Turkey and worldwide. However, the aim of this thesis was to understand how foreign 'relations' more broadly, in outlook, strategy and tools, can be influenced and shaped by other actors and how the government's foreign-policy options can be facilitated and constrained accordingly. This chapter has demonstrated how an environment conducive to reconciliation can be created, as with the case of Israel. How non-state actors can open up new areas for policy to develop, impelling the government to take a stance, as with the cases of Afghani-Pakistani relations and more notably, the IPC and their civilian capacity paradigm in TFP. Furthermore, this chapter has provided empirical support to show how civil-society actors can be the hand of the government when their hands are tied, as with the example of SETA, or specifically, Ufuk Ulutas's involvement with opposition negotiations in Syria. Finally, this

chapter has demonstrated how civil-society initiatives can extend and underlie official diplomatic relations; building trust and resolving conflict between multiple parties such as with the case of ORSAM and Iraqi Turkmens. Thus, although think tanks by no means possess the same authority or power as status quo institutions such as government bureaucracies or political parties in operationalizing ideas, they do play an important political role of informing and legitimizing foreign-policy shifts or ideas in the public sphere. Although much of this critique paints civil-society, and think tanks in particular, as simply an enabler of elite foreign-policy, the existence of an informal non-state structure that is an extension of Turkey's foreign relations as a global power is both important and on the most part, unique to the AKP era. It is reflective in many ways of the AKP's power ambitions and their changing views on diplomacy emphasising economic and cultural ties, once again supporting the core argument of this thesis regarding what is 'new' in TFP. The new civil tone in Turkey's foreign relations was publicized and developed significantly by the think tank sector. Yet even without the regressive impact of the Arab Spring, such a move was already tenuous. Financial impediments as well as continued monopolization and restriction of information on the part of the security elite and foreign ministry limits the potential influence of think tanks and has prevented them from playing their 'ideal' role: this demonstrates once again the conditional impact of CSOs, particularly regarding to the level of conflict in the state, political will and political opening (democratization level).

## **Chapter Five**

### **Faith-based NGOs: Turkey's Humanitarian Diplomats**

Following the preceding examination of the agenda setting, norm building and lobbying of economic interest groups and think tanks, this chapter explores a final and central area of change under the AKP: implementation through Islamic NGOs. It argues that the soft-power paradigm in Turkish foreign-policy discussed previously has had one key and enduring impact on Turkey's engagement with the region – with Turkey emerging as a 'humanitarian state'. The AKP has extended aid to former Ottoman lands through Islamically orientated NGOs, who have gained significant responsibilities in policy and operations under the remit of humanitarian diplomacy: emerging as a central constitutive force behind this genuinely new paradigm in TFP.

Emboldened by its improving economic prowess, democratic consolidation and stability under EU accession and international visibility, the AKP has diversified and utilized a growing foreign-policy toolkit. Through the business ventures discussed in chapter three, the expansion of Turkish Airlines routes across the Middle East, and the establishment of bureaucratic bodies in the region such as TIKA, Turkey has emerged as one of the foremost actors in international humanitarian assistance (IHA). As of 2012, Turkey is as the fourth largest donor, with only the US, the EU and the UK ahead. Their engagements in Somalia and Syria have been widely recognized, the image of Turkey as a humanitarian state and diplomat becoming a pivotal aspect of international perception of the country. A significant force behind this has been the growth and increasing activism of Islamically orientated Turkish NGOs, who have been on the rise in Turkey since the 1990s, when Turkey broadened its engagement with the region following the collapse of the Soviet Union. This chapter will explore how their activities in aid and service provision during regional conflicts catalysed the increased visibility and activities of Turkey's fledgling humanitarian diplomacy. The three faith-based NGOs this chapter focuses on are all Islamically orientated, grassroots organizations from the 1990s or early 2000s. The Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH), Kimse Yok Mu (KYM), International Blue Crescent, all reign from different segments of society, with the IHH reigning from the AKP's conservative heartland and sharing ideological affinity with the ruling party, KYM established as a Gülenist institution and the International Blue Crescent as broadly independent, supported by pious and secular people alike. How the norms, interests and agenda of these groups shape Turkey's humanitarian engagement is an understudied area and merits nuanced analysis.

It is argued here that their activities in disaster relief, cultural exchange and education initiatives formed an important element of Turkey's soft-power image and moreover, that Islamic NGOs have become one of the main channels by which Turkey engages with the



region. This underlies the core claims of this thesis regarding a change in the strategies and actors in TFP rather than an overt change in orientation or Islamization of foreign-policy. There are several specific reasons why faith-based NGOs have become so active and have emerged as a core channel for TFP towards the region: substantial funding, tax exempt status, experience and strong organizational structure. However, more broadly, and most important is ideational-alignment: the core recurring condition mediating CSO impact, as identified throughout this thesis. Islamic identity has enabled faith-based NGOs to establish strong grassroots backing, societal ties, and most importantly, organic relations with the AKP. Continuous emphasis on shared religious, ethnic and cultural identity in terms of Turkey's responsibility to, and connection with, the global (Muslim) community underlies and arguably drives Turkey's role in conflict-resolution, peace-keeping and aid and has consistently arisen in both government and NGO discourses on foreign relations.<sup>444</sup> This confluence of interest and identity under the guise of humanitarian assistance is the rationale for examining Turkey's developing aid institutions and the actors involved, not only as historical and contemporary practices within Turkey's foreign relations but plausibly *the* practice under the AKP. Turkey employs a much more expansive definition of what constitutes 'humanitarian aid' than generally used by the international community, including peace-building, development assistance and essentially any activity motivated by a sense of moral responsibility. Under the AKP, with their new foreign-policy activism in old Ottoman lands and their discourses on Turkey's identity as a humanitarian state, faith-based NGOs have emerged as a vital actor in what has been termed the civil paradigm in TFP.

Three faith-based NGOs were chosen for this study: The Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH), Kimse Yok Mu? and the International Blue Crescent, who have become engaged to a significant degree in Turkey's regional relations, in providing disaster relief and humanitarian assistance across the world, although notably largely to Islamic countries. The government is highly supportive of these organization's activities, including their aid within their Official Development Assistance (ODA) figures. The support from government officials is logical in this sense, as NGOs are reducing pressure on the state to provide these services. Faith-based NGOs have a long history of responding to emergencies, are well established and active in as many, in some cases more, countries as the government and have significant budgets. They work in cooperation with INGOs and Turkey's business community. These coalitions, as well as having independent international agendas, also seek to influence the government's foreign-

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<sup>444</sup> See for example Davutoglu's statements on the post-World War I division of the ummah in Behlül Özkan, "Turkey, Davutoglu and the Idea of Pan-Islamism," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 56, no. 4 (2014): 119–140; and Erdoğan's 2011 speech on responsibility towards the Muslim world, quoted in: Turkey moves ahead with new constitution, *The National*, 19 October 2011, Accessed through: <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/europe/turkey-moves-ahead-with-new-constitution> on (01/08/2015)

policy to be more beneficial to their aims.<sup>445</sup> That said, the characteristics and goals of these organizations dovetail with those of the government's, in establishing Turkey as a regional hegemon, explaining the growing role they play in Turkey's expanding cultural, humanitarian and trade activities in Islamic world: once again highlighting the primacy of interest alignment as the foremost condition mediating influence. Faith-based NGOs have become a key representative of Turkey through these activities and contribute to its image as a humanitarian power, however their growing role has caused problems for TFP since the Mavi Marmara and the Gülen-split, raising questions over the sustainability and implementation of Turkish aid policy in the future.

There are three parts to this chapter. Section one provides a historical overview of the emergence of faith-based NGOs and their increasing involvement in foreign humanitarian aid. Their ideational characteristics will be explored here in relation to faith-based and humanitarian discourses. Section two uses qualitative and quantitative data from field work on several faith-based NGOs, exploring their activities in the Middle East and highlighting the continued convergence of state and non-state activities in this sphere by looking at the parallel emergence of state-level discourses on humanitarian diplomacy and similar language and practices from Gülenist organizations: The Community. Section three addresses the institutionalization of the 'humanitarian diplomacy' paradigm in Turkish foreign-policy, the benefits and weaknesses of civil-society within this and the limits of such.

This chapter critically analyses the independence of these actors due to the substantial organic and ideational ties they have with the AKP, their sometimes questionably 'civil' status as CSOs and argues that despite this, the significant financial autonomy of these organizations and occasions of conflict identified in their activities show that faith-based NGOs are not simply a foreign-policy tool of elites but a significant actor in foreign relations in their own right. It contends that with the emergence and increased activities of Islamic NGOs, new tensions have arisen in TFP. From the Mavi Marmara to the relationship between Islamic aid and rebel groups in Syria, the responsibilities of non-state actors in Turkey's foreign relations has been an overlooked but important aspect of interstate relations under the AKP. The contributions of these groups are not always civil, nor inherently democratic. The different characteristics amongst these faith-based organizations, particularly those showing authoritarian or fundamentalist tendencies, requires further exploration to determine how the dynamics of Islam, aid and civil-society converge and what the repercussions of competing and sometimes contradictory forces have been for Turkey's foreign relations with the Middle

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<sup>445</sup> E. Dogan. Changing Motivations of NGOs in Turkish Foreign-policy Making Processes: Economy, Identity and Philanthropy. *The Institute for Turkish Studies*, Vol.3, issue 1. Spring 2013, p. 78.

East, holding theoretical value both for the study of TFP and of foreign-policy analysis and civil-society more broadly, as identified in the introduction.

### **1. The Evolution of Faith-based NGOs**

From the 1990s, when aid was primarily focussed on Turkic republics and to a degree, Palestine, to 2012 when aid was distributed to over 100 recipient countries, with the Middle East being the primary recipient, it seems clear that the very nature of Turkey's foreign relations has been changing under the AKP in a systematic and structural way. The prominence of peace-building and mediation activities in the Middle East and Africa as opposed to military missions is evidence to Turkey's transformation, but also a consequence of this change. Although similar state-building activities had occurred in the 1990s (mainly in post-Soviet states), there has been a significant expansion and deepening of such efforts under the AKP, forming an important focal point of Turkey's diplomatic and development activities. Faith-based NGOs have been the foremost actors in this expansion, as will be detailed in section two, however this analysis must be prefixed by an overview of their evolution as an important actor in TFP. This sub-section will explore the emergence of humanitarian NGOs (faith-based), their roots and identity in relation to parallel ideational discourses at state-level. Unlike chapters three and four, this section focuses almost exclusively on the AKP era as although many of these organizations were established in the mid to late 1990s, their activism and visibility outside of disaster relief emerged solely under the current administration, as did their overt focus on the Middle East and Muslim geography.

It was however under Özal and to a lesser degree, Erbakan that Turkey first began to adopt a more active role in international conflicts and development, although still largely restrained to the Palestinian Question. The economic development pursued by Özal, and particularly his agenda of regional and global integration hinged upon nation-branding, promoting a better image of Turkey abroad, and aid as a tool of soft-power and a method by which to expand trade ties with the developing world. Özal led Turkey's first foray into Africa in 1985, using the framework of humanitarian and development aid to Sudan and Somalia amongst other countries, who continue to materially benefit from Turkey's new regional involvement.<sup>446</sup> This reaped material rewards at home too, namely, a broad increase in GDP and a general enhancement of quality of life due to new economic opportunities, markets and an open economy. Arguably because of this increase in the standard of living domestically, Turkish decision-makers began to focus more and more on international rather than domestic issues

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<sup>446</sup> Murphy and Sazak, op cit.

leading to an increase in international aid activities during these formative years.<sup>447</sup> The connection between domestic economic development, international aid/ development assistance and Turkey's standing in world politics began to be conceptually and normatively connected during this era, a theme which would continue to become an almost hegemonic discourse under the AKP.

This signalled the first shift not only in Turkey's foreign relations, with connections to Turkey's old Ottoman lands in Central Asia in the Balkans renewed, but also in the method by which this was done, using foreign development assistance and aid to promote economic development and security in the region. It was during this period that non-state actors first began to play a role, particularly Gülenist organizations which began to establish schools in former Soviet states with the support of Özal and subsequent administrations.<sup>448</sup> The 1990s also saw the emergence of TIKA as the state bureaucracy responsible for expanding Turkey's regional influence through development aid. This expansion under Özal can be seen as the precursor to the AKP's renewed engagement with the Islamic world over a decade later, both in theory and practice. The language and practices of humanitarian aid have risen to the forefront of the political debate in contemporary Turkish politics. This transformation is particularly visible as it occurred in the wake of demilitarization/ desecuritization (at least discursively) as a new language and framework needed to be constructed to legitimize Turkey's engagement with conflict zones.

Desecuritization and demilitarization of Turkey's decision-making apparatus marked a turn in the language used in TFP and a new framing of nationalist foreign-policy. As security-based rhetoric waned, far more ideational and value-laden discourse based on responsibility to the region emerged under the AKP, referencing Turkey's Ottoman past and emphasizing Islamic civilization as a core element of Turkey's geopolitics. This all connects to the constructivist theoretical background of this thesis, however there are continuing realist/ material factors driving the AKP's new foreign-policy orientation and discourse. By providing aid and depicting itself as a humanitarian power, the AKP is attempting to increase its leverage over the region, and in doing so, its global standing, using soft rather than coercive power, often extended through non-state actors as relatively apolitical entities. Alongside think tanks, as discussed in the previous chapter, faith-based NGOs, with the increased resources available to them under the AKP and their ever-widening geographical scope have been a central element of these activities, and in pursuing low-level peace-building and aid to the region, are a constitutive element of Turkey's image abroad as a soft, humanitarian power. These

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<sup>447</sup> N.Çelik, and E.İşeri. "Islamically oriented humanitarian NGOs in Turkey: AKP foreign-policy parallelism." *Turkish Studies* 17, no. 3 (2016): 429-448., p.431.

<sup>448</sup> B.Balci, 'The Gulen Movement and Turkish Soft-power, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. February 4, 2014. Accessed through: <http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/02/04/g-len-movement-and-turkish-soft-power-pub-54430>

organizations have been on the rise in Turkey since the 1990s. This is for a variety of systemic reasons, democratization and EU accession being the foremost, widening the space for CSOs as discussed throughout this thesis, as well as due to the corresponding decline of aggressive secularism in the public sphere which reduced state reluctance to engage with religious organizations.<sup>449</sup>

Starting with the Foundation for Humanitarian Relief (the IHH), Turkish faith-based organizations and charities unlike many of their counterparts in business and academia instantly assumed an active role abroad, following the Bosnian conflict, Chechnya and the Kosovo crisis which catalysed the establishment and growing activism of many of these organizations. Earthquake/ disaster management was a central aspect of the work of faith-based NGOs after their collective empowerment due to their quick and effective response to the 1999 earthquakes in Turkey, which at points exceeded the capacity of the state. This, and their responses to subsequent disasters in Iran, Pakistan and Japan alleviated pressure on the government and thus allowed NGOs to gain some leverage by which to influence foreign-policy makers.<sup>450</sup> From their origins in emergency relief however, these development organizations have evolved both in discourse and policy and now focus on spheres previously dominated by the state and global governance institutions such as conflict resolution and peace-building, human rights, and democracy promotion. This is in part due to their effective responses to the aforementioned crises, but also due to changing laws on associations adopted in 2004, which previously limited CSOs activities abroad. Under the AKP, faith-based NGOs have been able to receive funding and donations from abroad, form partnerships with international NGOs, and no longer have to work through the Turkish Red Crescent, a GNGO. Turkish faith-based NGOs are now engaged in over 100 countries worldwide, with a distinctive focus on Islamic countries however. They specialize in medical aid, but also service provision in food, water, orphan care and education.

In Turkey, faith-based NGOs involved in humanitarian issues can be broadly separated into three categories; governmental or quasi-governmental, Gülenist and (avowedly) independent. The first two, including respectively organizations such as IHH and Turkish Red Crescent, and for Gülen affiliated organizations; Kimse Yok Mu, Deniz Feneri and Fezalar Education Institute, are powerful, influential and financially capable groups. The Gülenist organizations and the IHH in particular leading the charge in Turkey's growing international humanitarian activities which would later be described as humanitarian diplomacy, and ascribed to the strength of Turkish NGOs.<sup>451</sup> The last subsection however, the autonomous organizations face

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<sup>449</sup> See B.Toprak, 'Civil-society in Turkey', in Augustus Richard Norton (ed.), *Civil-society in the Middle East*, Leiden: EJ Brill, 1995, pp.87–119.

<sup>450</sup> M.Özkan and B.Akgün. (2010) Turkey's opening to Africa. *Journal of Modern African Studies* 48(4):525-546. P.8

<sup>451</sup> P.Akpınar, 'Turkey's Peacebuilding in Somalia: The Limits of Humanitarian Diplomacy',

marginalization, legal and financial attacks. Groups such as the International Blue Crescent and Yardim Eli Foundation have far fewer mechanisms of dialogue with the government and operate largely outside of the country so as to not attract the attention of the state, however when compared to other CSOs, still occupy a largely stable position in society.<sup>452</sup> As with the conservative business community, there appears to be a revolving door between Islamic NGOs and the government. Thus, although they often express that they are autonomous and in some circumstances, such as with IHH, take care to separate their activities from that of the governments for a variety of reasons, there remains a strong and organic connection between faith-based NGOs and the AKP. Despite changing relations with the government based on the socio-political affiliations mentioned above, faith-based NGOs do share a uniting feature that has meant they are well established and supported at a societal level, and thus have not suffered from state-oppression to a significant degree under the AKP: faith. All these organizations have either a mission statement with explicit religious values or else receive financial support from religious sources, which with the AKP's conservative support base, means they have acquired a particularly privileged status under the current government.

This privilege can be attributed to ideational alignment and capacity, in this case their grassroots support base: two of the core conditions of impact identified throughout. They are some of the few organizations in Turkey that donors can receive tax credits for, or that have public interest status. They benefit from strong discursive and moral support from the government and vice versa, with organizations such as the IHH hosting electoral events for the AKP. Additionally, the IHH alongside a significant number of faith-based NGOs are members of the National Will Platform, which organizes pro-government PR and events.<sup>453</sup> In sharing and propagating the same identity-based discourses as the ruling party, faith-based NGOs enjoy substantial access to embassies, policy makers and freedom in their activities abroad. Their activities are often run parallel to, or in coordination with, official humanitarian activities and they share an ideology that emphasized socio-economic development as the way to build peace in the region. In fact, in carrying the Turkish flag abroad, they have become unofficial representatives of the nation, something which interviewees demonstrated an acute awareness of.<sup>454</sup> By involving themselves in domestic politics to this degree, faith-based NGOs close to the government have linked themselves inherently to the AKP's political project, explaining why they are such a visible and pivotal element of Turkey's Middle East engagement. Their focus, although not exclusively, is highly oriented towards communities with shared religion or ethnicity. This is in part due to funding, with private donations often

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Turkish Studies, Vol.14, No.4, 2013, pp.735–57.

<sup>452</sup> Interview with Muzaffer Baca, International Blue Crescent, Istanbul, April 15, 2015.

<sup>453</sup> Milli Irade Platformu, Uyeler (Events). Accessed through: <http://milliiradeplatformu.com/uyeler> on (23/05/16)

<sup>454</sup> Interview with Savaş Metin, Kimse Yok Mu, Ankara, March 23, 2015; and Interview with Izzet Sahin, IHH headquarters, Istanbul, March 13, 2014.

guiding the direction of aid services. The Middle Eastern focus of faith-based NGOs can also be attributed to the convergence of governmental foreign-policy ambitions, domestic dynamics and the re-emergence of Islam within the public and political spheres. The faith-based nature of these activities is advantageous for both state and non-state organizations for multiple reasons.

Firstly, on a domestic level, they are able to mobilize civic engagement by using Islamic discourses.<sup>455</sup> Many Islamic NGOs such as the IHH and the Cansuyu Foundation (Lifeline) concentrate on providing relief during religious holidays and have explicit programmes to this end. The Cansuyu Foundation's Kurban (sacrifice) project distributes meat and arranges animal sacrifices in communities across the Islamic world, particularly in poverty stricken areas. However, Kimse Yok Mu argued during interviews that their Kurban sacrifice project is driven less by the organizations own religious duty and more by the understanding that charitable giving increases during Ramadan and thus, they will be able to amplify their support base and capacity for aid.<sup>456</sup> They asserted the humanist rather than religious nature of this aid by explaining that aid to non-Muslim communities during Ramadan is not labelled as Islamic donations. Faith-based NGO's ability to harmonize and in some circumstances, harness domestic dynamics, Islam and Turkey's foreign-policy ambitions contributed to their growing power and inclusion, drawing support from multiple elements of conservative society. Secondly, host communities seem to be more receptive to organizations that share in their religious/ cultural identity and Turkish CSOs have been very effective at establishing transnational grassroots networks to implement humanitarian aid.<sup>457</sup>

Hizmet- meaning service (to God and humankind) in Turkish, is a pervasive concept within the Islamic NGO sector and has encouraged those involved to defy the previously territorially bounded nature of their work and provide humanitarian services across the Islamic world, much of which is related to religious needs: the building of mosques, (religious) schools, circumcision services and particularly, water resources. The provision of water resources is dominant in the humanitarian activities of faith-based NGOs which according to Atalay, is based upon sections of the *hadith*.<sup>458</sup> This analysis was contested by interviewees however, and the provision of water resources was instead framed as a natural element of humanitarian work, although that may be because faith-based NGOs in Turkey have a vested interest and a historical reluctance to portray themselves as overtly religious organizations. There are also

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<sup>455</sup> Ibid.

<sup>456</sup> Interview with Metin, op cit.

<sup>457</sup> Interview with Somali peace-keeping and state-building official (anonymous), Skype, June 1, 2016.

<sup>458</sup> Al Bukhari, Sahih Al Jami'e, Hadith No. 5757, in Krafess 2005: 334, quoted in Z.Atalay, (2012) "Global Islam in the age of civil-society: Transnational civil-society, religion, and power." Unpublished dissertation., p.176

alternative explanations for the prevalence of circumcision programs. For example, circumcision reduces the chance of contracting HIV/AIDs by around 50 percent and given that most of these programs are aimed at high risk communities in sub-Saharan Africa, the presumption that faith dictates the humanitarian activities of these organizations should be rigorously questioned. The health benefits rather than religious motives for circumcision were raised by multiple high-level participants from Turkish Red Crescent, Doctors Worldwide (Turkey) and Yardimeli Derneği (Helping Hands Foundation) during the 2015 Istanbul Policy Center's workshop on International Humanitarian NGOs and Health Aid. They also asserted that the expansion of Turkish NGOs activities abroad was inherently connected to the AIDs crisis of the 1990s which created widespread need for international aid, of which Turkey is one of the biggest donors.

Regardless, there are clear religious dimensions to their activities, evident from the above discussion of faith-based NGOs' mobilization of aid during religious holidays and focus on the Islamic world. In some cases, even their aid deliverance systems are described using religious terminology, with the IHH's Izzet Sahin stating that: "Our system operates like the whirling dervishes of Rumi whose right hand is directed towards the sky to receive God's beneficence and left hand towards the earth and the people to deliver God's beneficence."<sup>459</sup> Despite clear religious overtones in their mobilization of aid domestically, interviewees contested that faith drives their activities.<sup>460</sup> Attempts at playing down Islamic identity in favour of humanitarian discourses can be related to the socio-political context of Turkey in the 1980s and 1990s, with legal restrictions on religion in the public sphere, as well as these organizations' ties with international donors and aid institutions. During interviews, even the most overtly religious organization explored here, the IHH, took care to emphasise that they are not exclusively active in Islamic countries, but also focus on poverty relief and aid to countries in need, particularly emergency relief such as that provided to Haiti. Furthermore, asserting that they operate as active negotiators between Muslim and non-Muslim populations such as in Myanmar.<sup>461</sup> What can be derived from this is that faith-based NGOs are striking a balance between humanitarian and ideational values. However, despite their purportedly neutral agenda in aid, strong religious and nationalist themes in their discourses call this neutrality into question. The ideational markers of religious kinship and fraternity found in the mission statements of faith-based NGOs should be read as an important distinction setting Turkish faith-based NGOs apart, with consequences for the type, direction and deliverance of

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<sup>459</sup> Izzet Sahin at the Istanbul Policy Centre's conference on the 'Role of NGOs in Turkey's Peacebuilding, Istanbul, 3 Dec. 2013. Cited in: Bülent Aras, and Pinar Akpınar. "The role of humanitarian NGOs in Turkey's peacebuilding." *International Peacekeeping* 22, no. 3 (2015): 230-247.

<sup>460</sup> Interviewees from KYM, International Blue Crescent and IHH claimed humanitarian rather than faith-based motivations for their work.

<sup>461</sup> Interview with Sahin, op cit.



aid. That said, there are strong interlinking themes and faith-based NGOs just like HNGOs at least ostensibly advocate for the principles of nonviolence, justice, the dignity of human life and equality.<sup>462</sup> Responsibility, peace, and social justice were found to be the core concepts underlying the advocacy activities of faith-based NGOs in Turkey and form the foundational belief system behind inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue, as well as non-violent conflict resolution and peace-building activities.<sup>463</sup>

That all these organizations also work in countries with non-Muslim populations, particularly disaster zones, lends support to the idea that humanitarian values are the driving force behind their activities. What we can see here is that faith-based and humanitarian values are aligned, and aside from the explicit relationship between donors and recipients during *Kurban Bayram*, in which individuals can make conditional donations, choosing the country in which the aid will be directed, the majority of Turkey's faith-based NGOs pursue aid activities common amongst mainstream humanitarian approaches.<sup>464</sup> Given the religious values underlying the Red Cross, the world's oldest humanitarian NGO, there is no need to separate these Turkish organizations based on their religious identity. The difference lies largely in their discourses. Turkish faith-based NGOs often highlight cultural and religious identity as reasons for the success of their aid practices. Terms such as 'oppressed Muslims' and 'oppressed peoples' are used almost interchangeably and there is a strong anti-colonial message underlying their discourses and criticism of Western aid practices. Particularly in Turkish rather than English language, the civic and humanitarian activities of faith-based organization are frequently framed not in terms of rights-based, but rather value-based, citing religious duty and moral responsibility, kinship and Islamic brotherhood.

The faith-based nature of these organizations endows them with broad domestic and international recognition and respect, drawing material and discursive support from conservative business and governmental elites, as well as society, which allows for greater global activities and influence. The support based for faith-based NGOs is indicative of the previously discussed relationship between conservative business associations, religion and Turkey's growing humanitarian aid capacity. The role of Sunni Islam in facilitating good working partnerships, both inter-organizational and bilateral donor-recipient relations, is important. It endows Turkish actors (both business and faith-based NGOs) with an advantage

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<sup>462</sup> See D.Smock, and Qamar-ul Huda. (2009). Islamic Peacemaking Since 9/11. USIP Special Report. No. 218, January 2009. Washington DC: USIP., and Abu-Nimer, M. (2003). Nonviolence and Peace Building in Islam: Theory and Practice. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, p.40

<sup>463</sup> Interviews and mission statements of IHH, KYM, Yardimeli Derneği and the International Blue Crescent.

<sup>464</sup> Aras and Akpinar, op cit, p.241.

based on their knowledge of local customs and norms. This all lends credence to the vision of faith-based NGOs as an integral and growing aspect of Turkey's active regional policy.

Notably, this forms an element of their agenda, with GNGOs such as IHH consciously regarding themselves as a foreign-policy actor and a constitutive element of Turkey's soft-power image. As IHH noted during interviews, many people do not recognize the IHH as a non-governmental organization, and they were well aware of their perceived position as a GNGO.<sup>465</sup> Kimse Yok Mu also noted their *de facto* position as a representative of the nation, in reference to their activities in Palestine, where their education centres are marked by the Turkish flag.<sup>466</sup> By literally and figuratively flying the Turkish flag in their aid missions abroad, faith-based NGOs act as the face of Turkey's humanitarianism. Arguably, in the last decade, NGO-led humanitarian/ development assistance in the region as well as concurrent efforts at peace-building have become core elements of Turkey's foreign-policy toolkit due to field advantages which will be discussed in the following sections. These organizations are not only an element of the AKP's winning domestic coalition, they are also increasing their scope and forming global alliances with a variety of formal transnational and international NGOs. As such, this section will explore the identity, discourses and activities of faith-based NGOs in comparison to the two main forces behind Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy: the state and the Community (Gulen). It will then go on to detail their growing role in foreign relations, focusing on the activities of three organizations, the IHH as a GNGO, Gulenist Kimse Yok Mu and the International Blue Crescent, an independent NGO.

## **2. Humanitarian Diplomacy in Action: The State, the Community and NGOs**

Since the mid-2000s, the AKP's political project as a diplomat, mediator and humanitarian state has hinged upon its capacity in international development assistance. The country's response to various crises which have caused chaos across the region has attracted global attention, with both governmental and non-governmental actors presenting the Turkish model as an alternative to Western donors. This has increasingly led to the incorporation of religious and civilizational narratives into TFP, with a firm Middle East and Islamic focus in action. Rapprochement, development aid and mediation activities in the Middle East alone constitute almost 50 percent of Turkey's total development aid.<sup>467</sup> Between 2007 and 2011, Pakistan, Somalia, Iraq, Libya, Syria and Palestine were the biggest recipients of Turkey's official

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<sup>465</sup> Interview with Sahin, op cit.

<sup>466</sup> Interview with Metin, op cit.

<sup>467</sup> Türkiye Kalkınma Yardımları Raporu (2012), Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı Başkanlığı, January 2013, p.6

humanitarian assistance respectively.<sup>468</sup> Subsequently Turkey, as of 2012, became the third largest country in international humanitarian assistance, contributing \$2.533 billion in ODA, \$151 million of which was provided by Turkish NGOs.<sup>469</sup> These activities have been grouped under the umbrella term of 'humanitarian diplomacy' by non-state and state actors alike, a relatively new concept in international politics. According to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), humanitarian diplomacy mobilizes publics, governmental support, international organizations, NGOs and the private sector as resources for humanitarian operations and programmes.<sup>470</sup> Turkey's status as a humanitarian state or diplomat has become an almost hegemonic discourse within policy circles since 2012, however the basis of this image was the activities of faith-based NGOs who have been working in conflict zones since the 1990s, implementing projects in aid, peacebuilding and development around the world. This activism has been encouraged and accompanied by governmental discourses and aid, showing the intersection of NGO humanitarianism and Turkey's national foreign-policy objectives. Here we can see the consequences of NGO activism in aid, with faith-based NGOs functioning as unofficial representatives of Turkey abroad.

Although still financially dominated by state actors, faith-based NGOs are growing in capacity and involvement, and there has been more room for their involvement in Turkey's humanitarian activities abroad under the AKP than during any other era. Before going on to assess the autonomous activities of faith-based NGOs in foreign aid and development however, and the contribution of this to Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy paradigm, it is important to prefix this with an understanding of the two other dominant groups in this sphere: the state and the Community. This section will explore the emergence of the humanitarian diplomacy paradigm in TFP and the actors behind it. It will then go on to profile the identity, characteristics and activities of four NGOs with pro-government, Gulenist and independent affiliations exploring how and if they have formed a constitutive aspect of Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy, or impacted on foreign relations more broadly.

## **2.1 The State**

Although faith and humanitarian values have been growing at a public level, and have been channelled through the aid activities of NGOs since the 1990s, the emergence of humanitarian diplomacy as a defining feature of TFP has been largely at the behest of governmental actors.

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<sup>468</sup> "Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2013," Development Initiative, 2013, accessed May 7, 2015, <http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/GHA-Report-2013.pdf>

<sup>469</sup> Ibid

<sup>470</sup> International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies Website, 'Humanitarian Diplomacy- Case Studies and Recent Stories. Retrieved from; <http://www.ifrc.org/en/what-we-do/humanitarian-diplomacy/>

The AKP has emphasised rapprochement, dialogue, mediation and human rights in its regional engagements, underlying which is a conceptualization of Turkey as a legitimate regional leader and mediator based on its historical and geopolitical right. The ideas behind this have still substantially stemmed from Turkey's foreign-policy architect, Ahmet Davutoğlu. All these activities can be encapsulated under the term 'humanitarian diplomacy', which is emblematic of Turkey's discursive approach to international politics under the AKP. His conceptualization of 'strategic and historical' depth is exemplary of one of the recurring themes of this thesis regarding Turkey's perceived responsibility towards the region based on cultural and historical identity. This overlaps with material interests insofar as Turkey benefits both economically and in terms of security from stability in the Middle East which in turn advances the AKP's aspirations for regional leadership.

According to Davutoğlu, humanitarian diplomacy is the essence of the transformation which has taken place in global politics and Turkey's role in it; a key explanatory principle of Turkish foreign-policy.<sup>471</sup> Moreover, according to Haşimi, is used as a model to explain almost all foreign-policy decisions from visa liberalization to Turkey's mediation attempts over nuclear Iran.<sup>472</sup> Most importantly, it has been used as a strategic reframing of what can be termed as neo-Ottoman ideas, with Davutoğlu arguing that: 'As we extend our humanitarian diplomacy beyond our borders, we do not confine ourselves to the psychological boundaries drawn between us and the Middle East in 1917, between us and the Balkans after the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913, and between us and the Caucasus with the war of 1877–1878 and World War I.'<sup>473</sup> This highlights the use of humanitarian diplomacy in legitimizing governmental policies: a presentable and marketable face of TFP. Davutoğlu also invokes it to explain transition from military hard-power towards an approach which values humanity, communication and conscience but also as an approach which would allow policy makers to transcend such a rigid dichotomy and maintain the 'critical equilibrium between conscience and power.'<sup>474</sup> It is also notable that Davutoğlu attributed Turkey's response to the Arab Spring to humanitarian diplomacy. This intended image of Turkey as a benign but strong regional leader appears to be an effective tool in mobilizing public support for foreign policies, in making decisions palatable to the international community and in representing the country as a democrat open to, and influenced by, humanitarian values and organizations.

As a legitimizing discourse, used for the first time in 2013, it appears that at least in terms of the framing of foreign-policy/ foreign aid (the two have become inextricably linked over recent years), policy makers are taking their cues from NGOs. In fact, during interviews with the

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<sup>471</sup> A.Davutoğlu. (2013) "Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy: objectives, challenges and prospects." Nationalities Papers 41, no. 6, p.865

<sup>472</sup> Haşimi, Cemalettin, op cit, p.141

<sup>473</sup> Ibid

<sup>474</sup> Davutoğlu, 2013, p.866

IHH, Izzet Şahin claimed the term ‘humanitarian diplomacy’ was first used by the IHH and Davutoğlu’s subsequent publicity of the term was due to their activities and discourses.<sup>475</sup> Şahin asserted that humanitarian diplomacy is an effective tool for Turkey as while other countries have alternative methods by which to implement their policies abroad, Turkey has soft-power.<sup>476</sup> The AKP’s self-image as a benevolent moral power has influenced its activities in a number of ways but most relevant for this thesis, in expanding social, diplomatic and humanitarian activities in the Islamic world. Turkey’s relatively new and expansive engagement in conflict zones and in providing emergency humanitarian aid from Palestine to Somalia has required a number of governmental and non-governmental agencies to collaborate and increase their capacity accordingly.<sup>477</sup> According to Davutoğlu; ‘Turkey’s understanding of humanitarian diplomacy is multifaceted and multi-channelled; there have been contributions from several of Turkey’s public institutions and NGOs, ranging from Turkish Airlines to TİKA, Kızılay, TOKİ and AFAD (Emergency Disaster Management Presidency).<sup>478</sup> This influence of humanitarian NGOs in the formation of the intellectual framework of humanitarian aid now utilized by Turkish policy makers in their foreign-policy agenda is significant and probably stands in starkest contrast with the humanitarian policy of previous governments (or lack thereof).

The emphasis on inclusion of civil-society actors as a resource and the AKP’s self-perception of Turkey as a humanitarian state underlines changes in Turkey’s modes of engagement with the Middle East. There are a few core elements of this change, which clearly play out in Turkey’s growing self-perception and international recognition as a humanitarian power. The first perspective focuses on aid policy as an aspect, or even agent, of Turkey’s nation branding activities, communicating and building its image as a global power to an international audience. This modal change highlights primarily the rational and economic self-interests related to aid and is in continuation of the approach taken by Özal. The second perspective and unique to the AKP era, aid as an actual method by which to elevate and secure Turkey’s global position. As recipient communities in MENA benefit from Turkey’s value based humanitarian aid (and democracy promotion) and bilateral/ multilateral relations increase accordingly, Turkey’s influence in the region expands, which in theory contributes to security and economic growth.<sup>479</sup> Finally and locally, the discursive emphasis on Islamic narratives of aid and benevolence from the government (but largely pursued in practice by non-governmental organization active in the field such as Kimse Yok Mu and the Turkish Red

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<sup>475</sup> Interview with Şahin, op cit.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid

<sup>477</sup> F.Keyman and O.Sazak, "Turkey as a “Humanitarian State”." *POMEAS Policy Paper 2* (2014).

<sup>478</sup> Davutoğlu, 2013, op cit, p. 867

<sup>479</sup> D. Lumsdaine, (1993). *Moral vision in international politics: the foreign aid regime, 1949-1989*. Princeton University Press; and S. Khagram., J. Riker, and K. Sikkink. (2002). *Restructuring world politics: transnational social movements, networks, and norms*. U of Minnesota Press.

Crescent) appeals to a conservative electorate, consolidating the AKP's support base and appeasing domestic demands regarding Turkey's moral obligation for activism and regional conflict resolution such as with the Palestinian issue. This final perspective raises the importance of domestic dynamics and normative identity politics in determining foreign aid policies and is arguably most unique to the AKP era due to their grassroots connections to Islamic civic society. Initially spurred on by a fortuitous alignment of economic development, democratic growth and expanding foreign-policy ambitions in the 1980s and 1990s, grassroots Islamic NGOs took advantage of this conducive socio-political environment to expand their activities and emerge as a popular and tangible force in Turkey's expanding relations with the region.

## 2.2 The Community

Clearly the government are not the only actor involved in humanitarian diplomacy. Gülen and his followers (the Community) have been an integral, if not foundational aspect of this new paradigm, accumulating much of the 'social capital' needed to promote this vision.<sup>480</sup> Thus, there are the two main blocs involved in the implementation of Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy, complemented and coordinated with smaller non-state organizations as has been discussed above. This sub-section explores the role of the Community more generally as an active agent of Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy prior to 2013, before detailing the role of faith-based NGOs including Kimse Yok Mu, a Gülenist organization.

The Hizmet movement are a networked civic movement operating on a global scale, particularly active in the areas of education, intercultural and inter-faith dialogue. Gülen and his affiliates (the *Cemaat*- community) have been the driving force behind Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy from the late 1980s until 2013. This is for a variety of reasons, not least of which their long and well-established networks in the region. Secondly, due to the establishment and political integration of Gülenist business associations under the AKP such as TUSKON, who finance the activities of the *Cemaat* in a variety of spheres, particularly humanitarian aid. Thirdly, due to their use of the media and cultural activities as tools to popularize their message. *Zaman* and their TV channel, *Samanyolu* are the most obvious examples of Gülen's competence in utilizing communications strategies to promote humanitarian activities and mobilize public support. *Zaman* is the most widely read Turkish newspaper, published in 10 languages and 35 countries. Alongside their radio and television programmes, *Zaman* regularly publishes news and analysis promoting the *Cemaat's*

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<sup>480</sup> Social capital is used by Bourdieu as a concept to analyse the opportunities, advantages and resources gathered from social relationships or networks, which then have a socio-economic capital. See P. Bourdieu, (1983). *Forms of capital*. J. Richards (ed) *Handbook of Theory and research for the Sociology of Education*, New York, Greenwood Press; and J. Coleman. (1988). *Social capital in the creation of human capital*. *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 94. 95-120.

humanitarian activities and spreading Gülenist ideology. Finally, their regional and area focus on countries such as Myanmar and Somalia (a focus later to be taken up by AFAD) which Turkey was not previously active in elevated the visibility of their activities both at home and abroad. Their business-NGO led coordination of aid, peacebuilding, development aid and emergency assistance as promoted and disseminated by Gülen media arguably formed the intellectual and strategic framework for Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy until the split escalated in 2013 and subsequent efforts on behalf of the government to shut down and replace their network.

Despite their apparent divide, discursively, the aims and practices of the Gülen movement and the AKP align. They both emphasise the importance of justice, responsibility, education and equality in their humanitarian discourses. Whilst the impact of recent deteriorating relations between the AKP and Gülen is not yet known, nor is within the scope of this thesis, it is obvious that Gülen's international activities, at least during the AKP's first two terms, were an integral aspect of Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy. Gülen has educational programmes covering 160 countries with approximately 1000 schools and up to 1000 cultural, dialogue, business and language centres, an impressive feat enabled by investment from the conservative business community and initial public support from the AKP and pro-government media, which included *Zaman* up until the split.<sup>481</sup> The stated purpose of these schools were to operate as an aspect of Turkey's public and humanitarian diplomacy and promote intercultural dialogue. However, in providing these services across the region, the movement holds significant leverage in educating new elites which has subsequent although indeterminable impacts on individual, societal and even bilateral relations, revealing underlying motivations behind some of Gülen's humanitarian diplomatic ventures. They have a particularly strong focus in northern Iraq for example, building schools, business centres, hospitals and a university.<sup>482</sup> Gülen-affiliates operated 18 schools in the region (approved by Barzani himself), with over 5,000 students, many of them reigning from elite families and thus likely to graduate into positions of power.

Thus, the core praxis of Gülenist thought emerges: to provide a bridge through education between the local and the global, using his schools as a functional mechanism of conflict prevention and humanitarian diplomacy but also as a tool by which to expand social influence. Education is not the only channel of bilateral communication and the Hizmet movement runs a range of business events and peacebuilding conferences, is a signatory to aid agreements and has established honorary consuls, contributing to the foreign relations of the AKP, and thus,

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<sup>481</sup> Turkey has become more visible due to activities of 'non-state' actors, Today's Zaman, op cit. Today's Zaman. April 3, 2013. Accessed through: [www.todayszaman.com/news-311563-turkey-has-become-more-visible-due-to-activities-of-non-state-actors-2.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/news-311563-turkey-has-become-more-visible-due-to-activities-of-non-state-actors-2.html).

<sup>482</sup> Zeki Saritoprak. (2005) "An Islamic Approach to Peace and Nonviolence: A Turkish Experience", in *The Muslim World*, Vol 95 (July), pp. 413-427, p.423

their status as a humanitarian diplomat. Its vast web of influence serving to establish the Gülen movement as the foremost representative of Turkey abroad, spreading the country's language and culture and advancing Turkey's interests through business and humanitarian activities. Prior to the split, this was a huge asset to the AKP's foreign-policy, however now represents an almost existential threat to the government as it attempts to dismantle Gülen's network, including much needed humanitarian projects, at home and abroad. The impact of the AKP's attempted closure of Gülenist schools and business ventures upon Turkey's image as a humanitarian diplomat is not yet known. However, during the Turkey-West Africa Trade Bridge summit, organized by TUSKON in 2014, it was repeatedly stressed that Turkish schools have been central to the cultural and economic interaction between Turkey and Africa. In response to government pressure for closure of the schools, another businessman stressed that "if those schools are closed down all ties with Turkey will be cut and knowing Turkey and conducting business will get harder."<sup>483</sup>

The Turkish government are by no means ignorant of the impact Gülen schools have on their image, nor of how they facilitate economic and political ties, and has attempted to create its own initiatives in Gülen's wake, and image. The AKP has founded Turkish cultural centres such as Yunus Emre, established in 2007, which follow the movement in method and design, as well as launching scholarships, cultural exchanges and building schools abroad. However, without the private funding, grassroots ties and institutional infrastructure of the Gülen movement, diplomatic ties may suffer and the image of Turkey as a soft-power has already derailed. As some of the most visible and best funded organizations in the field, the impact of their closure, as well as the very public spat between the AKP and Gülen for Turkey's image will, and has already been significant. Pressure on foreign governments to close Gülenist organizations shows the precedence of national interest, or the AKP's interests, over humanitarian values, and has led to diplomatic spats with countries as wide-ranging as India, Indonesia and Kenya.<sup>484</sup> The Gülen split arguably marked the end of Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy paradigm and the onset or re-prioritization of security and national interest within foreign affairs. That said, throughout this conflict, non-state actors, including Gülenist organizations, have moved forward with their humanitarian activities: reaping both positive and negative consequences for Turkey's image abroad. As a sustained force behind Turkey's engagement with the region, it remains important to address the interests, activities and impact of these organizations: who remain some of the most autonomous non-state actors regardless of state interventions.

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<sup>483</sup> Ibid

<sup>484</sup> Turkey puts pressure on foreign countries to close Gulen-linked schools, The National, 20 July. 2016. Retrieved from; <https://www.thenational.ae/world/turkey-puts-pressure-on-foreign-countries-to-close-gulen-linked-schools-1.157615> (07/10/2015)



## 2.3 The NGOs

As discussed above, Islamic and humanitarian discourses on aid, responsibility and civilization have become dominant at both a state and civil-society level over recent decades. It is argued here that this is in large part related to the increasing visibility and activities of faith-based NGOs, particularly Gülenist organizations who have a long history of international development. One of the reasons why the public sector can be seen to be taking their cues from civil-society is that they have assimilated the discourses of (primarily) Islamic NGOs and simply contributed to, or built upon their work in expanding relations with the Islamic world under the humanitarian remit first established by faith-based NGOs.

Until the AKP, Turkey was not engaged to any significant degree in soft-power practices of humanitarianism, education and capacity building. This is particularly visible in Africa, where Turkey's trade links and regional power ambitions as well as cultural bonds were first established by Islamic NGOs, SMEs and business associations who share normative, ideational and material interests in promoting Turkey as a legitimate regional leader. Unlike the business associations and think tanks discussed in previous chapters, who largely act as a channel or informer of foreign-policy, Turkish faith-based organizations are not only an instrument of the AKP's soft-power vision but actually implement it through their aid work in the region. They operate as the civilian wing of the government's humanitarian diplomacy. There are strong connections between these groups in their operations abroad and faith-based NGOs are engaged in a mutually profitable relationship with the state and the conservative business community. These sub-sections will explore four faith-based NGOs, the IHH as a GNGO, Gülen-affiliated Kimse Yok Mu, the Turkish Red Crescent (a GNGO) and the International Blue Crescent as an InNGO, discussing their characteristics, goals and activities in foreign relations which formed the vanguard of Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy paradigm.

### 2.31 The Humanitarian Relief Foundation: Arm of the AKP or Autonomous Actor?

The IHH is one of the most active faith-based organizations, with organic ties to the AKP and the conservative business community. Established in 1995 as a response to human (predominantly Muslim) suffering in Bosnia, Serbia and Chechnya, the IHH has rapidly expanded both in terms of its projects and outreach and is now active in 136 countries, one of the largest NGOs in Turkey. With extensive activities in medical and humanitarian spheres, they are one of the most visible and well financed faith-based NGOs in Turkey, with a budget of approximately \$100 million.<sup>485</sup> The IHH boast membership to the UN Economic and Social

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<sup>485</sup> Marc Champion. "Aid Group, Israel Primed for Clash, Flotilla Review Shows." *The Wall Street Journal*. 7 July 2010.  
<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704535004575349031510961398.html>

Council, the OIC, the Humanitarian Forum and the Council of International Organizations for Relief in Iraq, making it a powerful and globalized actor. They have received multiple awards from the Turkish General Directorate of Foundations and the Grand National Assembly of Turkey for humanitarian work, particularly in Iraq, indicative of the close relationship they enjoy with the ruling party. Despite the IHH's denial of relations with the ruling party, with members of the AKP sitting on the IHH's board of directors, and AKP minister Murat Mercan operating as head of the IHH's Foreign Affairs Committee, their close and organic ties are evident. These activities raise the question of their status as a 'civil' society organization, with the IHH representing a new type of non-governmental political actor, having positive and negative consequences for the state. This sub-section will explore their more traditional engagements before critiquing their growing and autonomous role in foreign relations, citing the case of Israel/ Palestine.

In many ways, the IHH operates as a traditional HNGO, providing emergency relief, aid and development. They also play a strong communicative role, garnering public awareness through widespread aid campaigns, hosting regular public events and meetings to mobilize the public concerning humanitarian issues.<sup>486</sup> They do not accept differentiation from mainstream HNGOs based on faith and claim their mission is to provide for "all needy and wronged people" through humanitarian aid, and to stand for social justice, basic liberties and human rights.<sup>487</sup> However the geography of their aid distribution – largely to old Ottoman lands – indicates that there are underlying ideational/ religious motivations for aid. They have an explicitly religious agenda in their discourse and practice based on analysis of public statements, country focus and media analysis, however their normative basis proves difficult to determine.<sup>488</sup> Nevertheless, there is a strong emphasis during interviews that religious identity is secondary to human rights issues. IHH diplomacy coordinator, İzzet Şahin, stated that "when we follow human rights issues in the world, we do not ask who is perpetrating them. Muslim or non Muslim, Christian or Jewish. For me, Netanyahu is better than Bashar Assad... We stand against the oppressor. If the Palestinians were the oppressor, we would stand with the Jewish people, as we have done before." He further went on to state that the murder of a single person is equal to the elimination of the entire human race, a sentiment with roots in Qur'anic verses, showing the hybridity of religion and human rights in the IHH's outlook.<sup>489</sup>

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<sup>486</sup> Interview data and observations from Istanbul, 2013.

<sup>487</sup> Interview with Şahin, and statement taken from: "Our Mission", İHH İnsan Hak ve Hürriyetleri İnsani Yardım Vakfı, Accessed through: <http://www.ihh.org.tr/misyonumuz/en/>

<sup>488</sup> A. Binder. (2014). The Shape and Sustainability of Turkey's Booming Humanitarian Assistance. *International Development Policy/ Revue internationale de politique de développement*, (5.2).

<sup>489</sup> Interview with Şahin, op cit.

One of the characteristics which distinguishes the IHH from other similar organizations is that it has an overtly politicized goal of subsuming a role usually played by states regarding conflict resolution and diplomacy. Alongside their long-term work in humanitarian aid, they regularly host foreign diplomats and government officials at the offices, going so far during interviews as to assert that they receive more foreign missions than the foreign office.<sup>490</sup> The IHH have hosted mediation talks with the Libyan opposition and were operating in Libya just two days after the onset of the crisis. Şahin referenced both the IHHs work in Syria and as an observer of the implementation of peace agreements in the Philippines as demonstrative of the organization's involvement in diplomacy. They explicitly argued, both during interviews and through public statements, that the mission of the IHH is to take an active role in solving international crises, for which inter-state diplomacy is not adequate.<sup>491</sup> He attributed their diplomatic successes to the independent and autonomous nature of NGOs, arguing that government representatives are seen only as the foreign policies of the state whereas NGOs are more flexible and efficient during negotiations. This is reflective of the IHH's view on track II diplomacy via societal and unofficial channels as a more effective form of conflict resolution/ mediation. During interviews the IHH were critical of traditional methods of diplomacy, arguing that: "In traditional diplomacy, the interests of the states do not match the needs of the people".<sup>492</sup> It is for this reason that IHH has become a leading actor in humanitarian diplomacy and negotiator in peacekeeping and prisoner exchange activities. They asserted that although the government has the means to lead such negotiations, their (economic) interests and foreign relations prevent them from doing so. NGOs on the other hand have only one interest; "to protect and serve human being, whatever their background."<sup>493</sup> This overtly political goal in pursuing non-state diplomacy is unusual for CSOs, and has made the IHH one of the most active and controversial actors in the field.

The IHH was the first and remains one of the most active Turkish NGOs operating in Africa with well-funded and successful health projects, particularly cataract surgeries, run alongside a range of domestic and international NGOs such as Doctors Without Borders. Such work is a strong example of the impact humanitarian aid can have on Turkey's international image and they have become an integral aspect of public diplomacy with evocative campaign slogans such as "they will see if you help" and "100,000 Africans will see with Turkey".<sup>494</sup> It is also reflective of their motivations in expanding geographic reach however, and can be attributed to the extensive outreach this form of service provision provides for the IHH. Like many of the organizations discussed here, the IHH is most active during religious holidays, particularly

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<sup>490</sup> Ibid

<sup>491</sup> Ibid

<sup>492</sup> Ibid

<sup>493</sup> Ibid

<sup>494</sup> IHH Website, Let them "see the light" with your donations. Accessed through: <http://katarakt.ihh.org.tr/en/main/news/0/let-them-see-the-light-with-your-donations/52> (13/09/2016)

Ramadan as they are able to collect *Zakat* donations and capitalize upon Muslim solidarity due to their social awareness leading campaigns such as “Now is the time to share with our brothers and sisters”.<sup>495</sup> They asserted during interviews that increased activity during these periods enables them to have more constructive grassroots relations as both locals in recipient countries and donors in Turkey appreciate the religious and moral solidarity such work represents.<sup>496</sup> They have worked closely with TIKA on aid coordination to Gaza and have been lobbying the government to lift visa requirements for Palestinians whilst simultaneously putting an end to the visa exemption for Israelis, once again showing the more overtly politicized nature of the IHH and their attempts at lobbying, unusual for HNGOs. According to Cevik, this politicization of faith-based NGOs via the IHHs activities has led to greater inclusion in decision-making for mediations efforts.<sup>497</sup> This is likely attempt on behalf of the government to curtail the autonomy of these organizations following Mavi Marmara by institutionalizing them in policy-making and providing more official channels for political action.

As Bülent Aras argued in his piece on mediation for the foreign office; ‘Turkey’s international mediation is built on new capabilities of multidimensional and dynamic foreign-policy, and the ability to coordinate this with the demands of various societal groups. This new foreign-policy has raised the country’s profile by way of bilateral, regional and international initiatives.’<sup>498</sup> Nowhere is this truer than of the IHH. They have become a powerful social force behind TFP towards Israel, however whether this is reflective of a multidimensional foreign-policy, or of the AKP’s use of CSOs as part of their new foreign-policy toolkit to pursue avenues closed off to government actors is debatable. The IHHs links to Hamas are critical in this context. The AKP have utilized civil-society dialogue as a channel through which to maintain relations with Hamas. This transition from official to unofficial diplomacy was due to earlier attempts at communication with this group being harshly criticized by the international community (particularly the US and Israel) resulting in Turkey losing its credibility as a mediator in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and thus damaging its nation brand as a humanitarian diplomat. Consequently, the AKP was no longer able to exert influence through open and more transparent methods such as inviting Khaled Mashal to Istanbul, instead choosing to covertly support organizations such as the IHH to act as their political proxy.

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<sup>495</sup> IHH Website. Ramadan: Time to share with our brothers and sisters. Accessed through: <http://www.ihh.org.tr/ru/main/news/0/ramadan-time-to-share-with-our-brothers-and-s/2862> (13/09/2016)

<sup>496</sup> Interview with Sahin, op cit.

<sup>497</sup> Cevik and Senem, op cit.

<sup>498</sup> Aras and Akpınar, op cit. p. 2

The IHH have been successful as an unofficial mediator on behalf of the government, in keeping channels of dialogue open, but also autonomously. The IHH have met with multiple state and non-state actors such as Iran and opposition groups to pursue a democratic and non-violent resolution of the conflict.<sup>499</sup> They have also been involved in numerous successful hostage negotiations: notably helping to ensure the release of Gilad Shalit through talks with Hamas. Their involvement in the Syrian crisis and mediation negotiations have taken place without the consent of the AKP and in the void of the government's inaction according to interviews.<sup>500</sup> In 2012 they met with Syrian officials in Damascus to discuss the formation and implementation of a humanitarian aid corridor, conducting cease-fire negotiations simultaneously. The IHH have maintained channels of communication into Syria which allowed them to use what they term as humanitarian diplomacy to secure the release 2,137 Syrians, 70 Iranians, six western reporters, one Afghan, reporter Adem Özköse, cameraman Hamit Coşkun as well as İdris Çanakçı and Ekrem Cığırli from the Syrian Intelligence Agency and from rebel forces.<sup>501</sup> This is indicative of the power IHH possess as an international mediator, and also the willingness of an NGO to assume a role usually played by states, yet is also concerning for some observers due to the lack of transparency regarding the negotiation process and the aforementioned accusations of supplying arms to terrorist groups.

Given their access to policy makers and ties with the elite, it appears that even their seemingly autonomous activities in diplomacy continue with complicit governmental support, raising their status as a GNGO once more. That said, their activities surrounding the Mavi Marmara represent an important example of the growing (and not necessarily beneficial nor benign) power CSOs can exercise over bilateral relations. It is interesting, and unprecedented, that an NGO should have such a dramatic and detrimental effect on bilateral relations in Turkey. There were a number of socio-political factors which facilitated this rare and tangible impact of a CSO which will be explored here, before detailing the IHH's impact on Turkish-Israeli relations. Firstly, the state had indicated it was open to societal contestation regarding Israel in the aftermath of Operation Cast Lead. Secondly, the stability of the Turkish-Israeli alignment was already being challenged by the government, leaving further room for societal subversion. Thirdly, the international reaction to Cast Lead brought forward a number of social organisations whom the IHH and others could ally and share resources/ knowledge with. Finally, there was not only division within the AKP on how to handle this issue, but actual support, with some members of parliament intending on joining the flotilla, highlighting the openness of the Turkish government and facilitation of certain protest activities by the state.

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<sup>499</sup> Interview with Sahin, op cit.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid

<sup>501</sup> İnsan Yardim Vakfi, Humanitarian Diplomacy in Syria. Accessed through: <http://www.ihh.org.tr/en/main/pages/suriye-insani-diplomasi/314> (11/09/2016)

A lesser known occurrence preceding this catastrophe was the efforts made by the Turkish government in the lead up to the flotillas departure. Initially the government appeared to be broadly supportive of the movement, with interviewees from Kimse Yok Mu describing official efforts to mobilize and politicize other NGOs to join the flotilla.<sup>502</sup> This was quickly followed by a u-turn in official policy, likely the result of pressure from the Israeli side and the government attempted to prevent the flotilla from leaving, using unofficial connections and the threat of legal sanctions according to interviews with the IHH.<sup>503</sup> When it became apparent this would not be possible, efforts were made to negotiate with both the Israeli government and the leaders of the Mavi Marmara to ensure that if difficulties occurred the ships would turn back towards the Egyptian port of al-Arish unharmed. According to an interview by International Crisis Group with Ahmet Emin Dağ, IHH Middle East coordinator, he was requested not to go directly to Gaza on the basis of already deteriorating relations with Israel due to Turkish objection to increasing sanctions on Iran.<sup>504</sup> Interviews with IHH confirmed these negotiations and revealed IHH had agreed to the terms set by the AKP, yet defied their calls to halt the flotilla indefinitely on the basis that there was no legal justification for this within Turkish law. Thus, the flotilla departed, according to the Turkish government, alongside assurances from Israel that unwarranted force would not be used.<sup>505</sup> The subsequent death of 8 Turkish citizens and an American citizen with Turkish heritage caused outrage in Ankara and led to a rapid and almost full dissolution of bilateral relations.

Following this, the IHH has stood as the primary barrier against the normalization of bilateral relations until all of Turkey's requests have been fulfilled: primarily the lifting of the blockade on Gaza.<sup>506</sup> To do this they have mobilized media and public pressure on the government, organizing regular protest marches with thousands of attendees using evocative ideationally framed slogans such as 'Mavi Marmara is Our Pride', 'Thousand Salam to the Martyrs' and 'Palestine Cause is Our Cause'.<sup>507</sup> During the 2015 rally IHH president Bülent Yıldırım stated that "Israel we gave you such a present that you will never forget. We made you so lonely and isolated from which you will never recuperate. We have taken Turkey and these people back from you."<sup>508</sup> Such powerful statements may well be accurate as the IHH's frequent marches and meetings on this issue have been attended by influential AKP ministers, journalists and NGO representatives. During interviews, the IHH acknowledged the power they hold in

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<sup>502</sup> Interview with Metin, op cit.

<sup>503</sup> Interview with Sahin, op cit.

<sup>504</sup> "Turkey's Crisis over Israel and Iran" *International Crisis Group: Europe Report N.208- 8 September 2010*. p.10. Accessed through: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/western-europemediterranean/turkey/turkey-s-crises-over-israel-and-iran> (09/07/2015)

<sup>505</sup> "Turkey's Crisis over Israel and Iran" op cit. p.10

<sup>506</sup> Interview with Sahin, op cit.

<sup>507</sup> IHH Website, Thousands march for Mavi Marmara and Quds., Accessed through: <https://www.ihh.org.tr/en/news/thousands-march-for-mavi-marmara-and-quds-2858> (04/05/2015)

<sup>508</sup> IHH Website, Thousands march for Mavi Marmara and Quds. Accessed through: <http://www.ihh.org.tr/ru/main/news/0/thousands-march-for-mavi-marmara-and-quds/2858>

prolonging this diplomatic crisis and in directing more attention towards the Palestinian cause, which in turn has had an impact on the government's possible resolution options and upon their discourses on this topic.

Sahin stated regarding the normalization process that the IHH and the AKP have completely different agendas and the IHH has come into conflict with Turkish government officials over this issue. The IHH have become increasingly aware of their ability to defy governmental wishes since Mavi Marmara.<sup>509</sup> Such rifts are one explanation of why the IHH distanced itself from the AKP so much during interviews, but also demonstrative of their decreasing reliance on governmental acceptance and increasing autonomy and empowerment since Mavi Marmara. Government officials have responded with much the same language, with Turkey's Minister for European Affairs claiming that "The I.H.H has nothing to do with the AK Party".<sup>510</sup> Another explanation of the rift is due to the Arab Spring, particularly the Syria crisis but also over Libya and Israel. The IHH was extremely critical of the AKP's continued association with Gaddafi but alternately, has consistently requested that the AKP do not sever ties with Assad and has operated as an unofficial mediator between Syria and Iran against the government's wishes according to interviews.<sup>511</sup> Furthermore, IHH president, Bülent Yıldırım criticised the AKP for the gap between actions and rhetoric when it comes to Israel, requesting that Turkey internationally condemn Israel, submit formal documentation to the ICC and put an end to the commercial partnership between the two countries.<sup>512</sup>

Since assessing the IHHs activities, particularly those mentioned during interviews, it appears that the IHH has a much more politicized agenda than any other Turkish NGO. Although they are primarily a humanitarian aid organization, their activities in this sphere were only referred to once, and that was within the broader context of criticising both Turkish and international responses to the Syrian crisis. When viewed alongside the analysis of their role in, and the impact of Mavi Marmara, the IHH is clearly pursuing with a more active role in foreign relations, conflict resolution and track II diplomacy. While there was a significant and tangible impact of a CSO on foreign relations found, a rare occurrence, there were important environmental factors which allowed this to happen. The post-liberalization and desecuritization emergence of civic society (public opinion, the media and NGOs) as actors in the sphere of foreign relations as discussed in the preceding chapters had a significant impact on the development of Turkey's moralistic and value-based discourse regarding human (and

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<sup>509</sup> D.Bilefsky and S.Arsu, Sponsor of Flotilla Tied to Elite of Turkey. New York Times, July 15, 2010. Accessed through: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/16/world/middleeast/16turkey.html> (01/05/2015)

<sup>510</sup> Bilefsky and Arsu, op cit.

<sup>511</sup> Interview with Sahin, op cit.

<sup>512</sup> İHH Başkanı Bülent Yıldırım'dan çarpıcı tespitler; Türkiye, Suriye ve Mısır'da nasıl hata yaptı? (Striking findings from IHH President Bulent Yildirim; How Turkey has made mistakes in Syria and Egypt) *Zaman*, January 24, 2015. Accessed through: <https://www.zaman.com/tr/> (05/02/2015)

particularly Palestinian) rights. This contributed to Turkey's self-image and empowerment vis-à-vis Israel, laying the foundations for the downgrading of Turkish-Israeli relations even before the series of dramatic events that was Operation Cast Lead, Davos and the Mavi Marmara incident catalysed a diplomatic ice age. It appears that during direct crisis points, as was the case with Israel, but also regarding the refugee crises in Iraq and Syria as will be discussed in the following sections, Turkish faith-based organizations can play a more potent political role than other CSOs.

### **2.32 Kimse Yok Mu?: The Unofficial Purveyors of Humanitarian Diplomacy**

Aside from the more overtly politicized activities of the IHH, Turkish faith-based NGOs are more traditionally engaged in infrastructure and capacity building, extending social and cultural networks and providing humanitarian assistance which has established NGOs as representatives of Turkey abroad. Much of this is done through education initiatives, vocational training, and development aid, scholarships and cultural exchange, and is an unofficial aspect of humanitarian diplomacy, although largely condoned, and often encouraged by the AKP. In representing Turkey abroad, Gülen-affiliated organizations dominated prior to the conflict with the AKP due to their substantial funding, significant networks and high-levels of institutionalization.

Gülenist Kimse Yok Mu is one of the largest and best funded NGOs in Turkey and is heavily engaged in providing humanitarian assistance to the region. Established in 2004, KYM relies on public mobilization and has its roots in a television programme from 2002 which aimed at communicating the plight of those in poverty or need to the Turkish public: highlighting the interesting connectivity between Turkish television and humanitarian aid, a primary method through which the government mobilizes funds. Their public call for aid was quickly popularized and the organization was conceived, becoming the main channel through which Gülen and his affiliates delivered aid to developing (predominantly Muslim) countries, with over 3 million donors worldwide.<sup>513</sup> Furthermore, and aligned with Gülenist thought, KYM have emphasised the society-centric education, informative and awareness raising approach of their work, asserting that their grassroots connections are crucial to their success, as well as their ability to work with multiple players, particularly those from Christian or Jewish communities.<sup>514</sup> Despite the dominance of Gülenist organizations in the spheres of social and cultural aid practices, the government – particularly since the Gülen-split – is increasingly attempting to provide similar services, underscoring the importance of these initiatives in TFP. This sub-section will first explore KYM's activities in capacity building and development,

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<sup>513</sup> Hizmet News, Kimse Yok Mu, October 29, 2014. Accessed through: <http://hizmetnews.com/14006/despite-blocking-accounts-kimse-yok-mu-able-collect-donations/#.WSmI2GnyvIU>

<sup>514</sup> Interview with Metin, op cit.



their status as unofficial representatives of Turkey abroad, before going on to assess the impact of the Gülen divide and the government's attempts to fill this void due to the importance of these activities for Turkey's image as a humanitarian diplomat.

KYM was one of only 12 organizations granted Public Interest Association status which enables it to collect public donations without pre-approval and in general solidifies the legal status of the organization vis-à-vis the state. Like most of the organizations discussed here, KYM began by providing disaster relief but quickly expanded their outlook and practice in response to widespread social need, both domestically and internationally. They primarily focus on education, health (providing cataract operations), humanitarian aid and disaster relief programmes, as well as conducting sustainable development projects in capacity building and infrastructure development from Africa to Pakistan, with their highest concentration of work being in Palestine. Despite the privilege their Public Interest status may imply, KYM insist that they have no relation to, or influence over, the government. Although almost certainly now the case due to the AKP-Gülen rift, prior to 2008 KYM were able to coordinate on some matters, particularly in Pakistan and Somalia where they worked alongside TIKA regarding transport and security logistics.<sup>515</sup> Their ongoing connections to the government are primarily informal and field based according to Mr Savaş Metin, the Secretary General of KYM, with the organization preferring international partners. Metin emphasised the lack of communication and coordination with the government regarding their activities in the field, going so far as to assert that they do not inform the government and that "I'm sure they [the AKP] don't even know".<sup>516</sup> However, given the close relations Gülenist organizations enjoyed with the AKP prior to the split, statements such as these can be read as reactionary given interviews took place following the conflict. Governmental statements prior to 2008 paint a very different picture, with Prime Minister Erdoğan publicly praising KYM.<sup>517</sup>

As with the IHH, the religious dimensions of aid are visible in KYMs mobilization of conditional donations during Ramadan, providing food aid via *iftar* across Turkey and to the Muslim world. Food aid during *Ramadan* and *Eid-ul-Adha* is an important aspect of the work done by faith-based NGOs, grounded in religious obligations found in the Qur'an and the Hadiths. The mobilization of public funds and support based on religious imperatives is not the only form of humanitarian diplomacy conducted by KYM. They have multiple water projects and orphan care programmes, both of which also have grounding in Islamic theology and are the most visible aspects of Turkey's charitable (religious) aid in the Muslim world. In addition to this, KYM runs ongoing student workshops calling for innovative research on

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<sup>515</sup> Ibid

<sup>516</sup> Ibid

<sup>517</sup> T.Michel. (2008). Fighting Poverty with Kimse Yok Mu, in Ali Yurtsever. "Islam in the Age of Global Challenges: Alternative Perspective of the Gülen Movement." Washington, DC: Rumi Forum/Tughra Books, 2008. p.4

sustainable development. Alongside creating social awareness, the students who compete in this become solution partners for KYM and some of their ideas are implemented. This public form of aid forms the foundational structure of Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy. Furthermore, despite being marginalized by the current government, KYM are sufficiently powerful as an organization to continue autonomously and thus, have an impact on Turkey's foreign relations regardless. They have been involved in the signing of multiple bilateral and multilateral aid agreements which has certainly contributed to Turkey's image abroad and are an active and visible part of international peace-building efforts in Syria, Israel/ Palestine and the Philippines.<sup>518</sup> One of the channels by which they do this is running conferences with high-level participants from across the world, with the aim of engendering better dialogue mechanisms and contributing towards peace-building.<sup>519</sup>

KYM has close ties with the KRG, particularly working alongside the Barzani Foundation and the governor of Erbil, Nevzad Hadi, who has offered his gratitude to KYM regarding their education work in Northern Iraq and aid to Syrian Kurds across the region.<sup>520</sup> They have signed education protocols with the KRG but argued that this is not a political act, stating that they work with whoever is responsible. KYM has taken care to emphasise that the orientation of their aid deliverance is not based on religion but rather need: arguing during interviews that religion is not important for KYM as they are humanists. According to KYM, "From the perspective of human rights we construct water wells. We Believe access to clean water is a human right. Access to proper education is a human right. Access to proper healthcare is a human right. Education (ignorance) is the biggest challenge we face."<sup>521</sup> This highlights the humanitarian rather than religious framing used by faith-based NGOs. They work in a variety of non-Muslim countries such as Peru and China and have aligned with Christian and Jewish organizations such as the Catholic Relief Services, as well as the African Union. They have also worked alongside US government representatives to combat the Syrian refugee crisis, effectively lobbying them to begin fundraising activities in their home communities.<sup>522</sup>

KYM themselves are not active in Syria, nor directly in Palestine although they channel significant amounts of aid to the two countries through local partners: Give Gaza and the Al Zakah Committee of Jerusalem in the West Bank. This is because in Palestine they lack suitable connections with the government and in Syria, due to the threat of radical organizations and because, as they claim, Syria is an "international problem necessitating an international solution", indicative that they, like the government, feel that Turkey has been

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<sup>518</sup> Interview with Metin, op cit.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid

<sup>520</sup> Looking at Turkey from Erbil, Bugun, November 8, 2011. Accessed through: <http://www.bgnnews.com/pages/marticle.aspx?id=1382> (23/04/2015)

<sup>521</sup> Interview with Metin, op cit.

<sup>522</sup> Ibid

under unfair pressure to unilaterally deal with the Syrian crisis.<sup>523</sup> Regardless, the concentration of KYM's efforts on communities with religious and kinship ties to Turkey is important. They have been one of the most active agencies providing relief and mobilizing public support for the Palestinian cause and have been operating indirectly there since their inception. Their activities have in fact been praised by the AKP regarding this issue, highlighting the alignment in foreign relations priorities between the AKP and Gülen affiliates and the centrality of the Palestinian issue to Turkish state and society. Their aid here becomes representative of Turkey abroad, an issue compounded by the symbolic flying of a Turkish flag above Kimse Yok Mu's school in Gaza.<sup>524</sup> Furthermore, they have recently taken up the plight of the Turkmens in northern Iraq, using emotive value-based language invoking kinship ties as is common amongst faith-based organizations. The Turkmen crisis is one of the foremost examples of Turkish inter-agency cooperation by KYM who as aforementioned, generally prefer to work with global governance institutions. They mobilized quickly alongside AFAD and the Turkish Red Crescent providing emergency relief to IDP's in northern Iraq.<sup>525</sup>

KYM's mobilization of aid specifically for Turkmens in northern Iraq, and their enduring activities in education, capacity building and infrastructure development alongside Gülen-affiliated businesses is a practice also pursued by government officials. ORSAM – discussed in chapter four – also foster societal ties at this level and at the behest of government officials. This highlights the importance given to fostering ethnic-ties by the ruling AKP, as well as the unofficial capacity of NGOs to serve the government's foreign-policy agenda: which in this case, can be described as expansionist under the guise of humanitarianism. Organizations such as KYM, unwillingly or otherwise, do just this by enacting the government's foreign-policy priorities abroad (education, development and aid along ethnic or religious lines). Regarding their status as unofficial representatives of Turkey abroad, KYM stated that “We have had a very positive effect. People know that Kimse Yok Mu comes from Turkey. We do not help people conditionally, there is no second agenda. We help people without any expectations.”<sup>526</sup> However, Metin then raised the impact of the AKP-Gülen split, claiming that Erdoğan's visit to various African countries and attempted closure of Gülen schools has seriously damaged Turkey's image abroad. This raises the impact of domestic dynamics, in particular along partisan or ideological fault lines, on the global arena.

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<sup>523</sup> Ibid

<sup>524</sup> Ibid

<sup>525</sup> Kimse Yok Mu, *Türkmen Kardeşlerimiz İçin Yola* (On the road for our Turkmen brothers and sisters). Accessed through:

<http://www.kimseyokmu.org.tr/?p=guncelfaaliyetalanlari&gl=guncel&cl=turkmen&l=giris>

<sup>526</sup> Interview KYM.

Kimse Yok Mu's activities have been severely constrained since the Gülen affair began and they have suffered legal attacks which have suspended their ability to collect public donations and criminal investigations regarding purported terrorist affiliations. This is a particularly interesting accusation as it was originally based upon KYMs relations with the Syrian Democratic Turkmen Movement, who have since spoken out arguing that their relations are primarily with AFAD, seconded by KYM and that the transfer of aid across the border continues to be directed by AFAD a government institution.<sup>527</sup> This politically motivated move contradicts much of the AKP's ethnic-based and value-laden policies towards Turkmen populations. The importance of KYM's work to Turkey's image as a humanitarian diplomat, while seemingly unacknowledged by government officials of late, cannot be negated. They were one of the largest and best funded NGO operating in Turkey and thus, one of the most capable actors in providing humanitarian aid to various crisis zones in the region: assistance that the government greatly needs given the ever-escalating Syrian refugee crisis. They are also the first Turkish organization to reach Global Geneva's top 100 list of NGOs and have strong connections with global governance institutions such as the UN, where it holds special consultative status, as well as the Economic and Social Council and the UNHRC, showing growing global recognition of the work they do. However, the AKP's treatment of KYM shows that in this case domestic dynamics or even individual psychological issues related to the so-called parallel state have prevailed over foreign-policy strategies of humanitarian diplomacy, to the detriment of Turkey's soft-power image.

### **2.33 The Turkish Red Crescent: NGO or just Governmental Organization?**

Prior to the Arab Spring, the Turkish government gave almost no humanitarian or development aid to Syria, preferring diplomatic and commercial channels of bilateral relations. With the onset of the crisis and the profound need for aid over the border, the government needed to work through existing societal level channels, particularly using trade organizations located in the south-east of Turkey and aid organizations already operating in the field: predominantly faith-based NGOs such as Turkish Red Crescent.

The Turkish Red Crescent (Kızılay) is officially a non-governmental organization and the largest and oldest in Turkey.<sup>528</sup> Particularly in Iraq and Syria, Kızılay operates as the main vehicle by which the AKP delivers and implements humanitarian aid, working alongside AFAD and the IHH: with this state-non-state coordination emerging as the distinctive feature of Turkey's foreign aid practices. Their integration into policy-making means their status as

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<sup>527</sup> Y.Tiryaki, Prime Ministry approved Kimse Yok Mu, now accused of 'terrorism', BGN news, April 19, 2015. Accessed through: <http://national.bgnnews.com/prime-ministry-approved-kimse-yok-mu-now-accused-of-terrorism-haberi/5244>

<sup>528</sup> "Turkish Red Crescent delivers USD 2.5 billion of humanitarian aid in 2012", Anadolu Agency, 22 August 2013. Accessed through: <http://www.aa.com.tr/en/rss/218569--aa> (12/03/16)

an NGO is questionable however. They are delegated to provide humanitarian assistance based on directives from embassies and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, dramatically reducing their autonomy in directing aid.<sup>529</sup> That said, they do operate autonomously from the government, receive international funding and have charity tax-exempt status, meaning they should still be considered within this analysis but under the category of GNGO with special status. This subsection analyses the motivations for, and activities of the Turkish Red Crescent as the government's chosen channel for humanitarian aid, addressing what that means for their status as a CSO.

Kızılay has grown exponentially under the AKP and they have very close cooperation and coordination with the government. Kızılay works primarily on emergency relief, disaster management, health and social services including psychological support and education. They are one of the few organizations in Turkey benefiting from Public Interest Association status, enabling them to collect private donations, most importantly one of the few organizations able to collect *Zakat*. Particularly during the AKP's second term, Kızılay expanded their operations and between 2007 and 2012, they delivered aid to over 70 countries, primarily in Africa, Central Asia and the Middle East. They have implemented emergency relief operations in Iran (2003), Sri Lanka and Indonesia (2004), Pakistan (2005) and Lebanon (2006), with ongoing development projects in Syria, Iraq and Palestine. The Gaza operation, which is coordinated closely and monitored by government institutions such as TIKA and AFAD is a prime example of the AKP's foreign aid strategy through NGO cooperation: a joint effort by the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces and the Turkish Red Crescent. This project has so far resulted in the treatment of hundreds of victims of violence in Gaza since 2008, provided crucial emergency services and led to the establishment of an air corridor for the deliverance of humanitarian aid.<sup>530</sup> Furthermore, they delivered \$2.5 billion of humanitarian aid in 2012 alone, largely to Arab Spring countries, which notably are largely part of Turkey's old Ottoman geography.<sup>531</sup> This focus on Gaza, old Ottoman lands and Arab Spring countries is paralleled by the AKP, raising once again the issue of autonomy for the Turkish Red Crescent

Notably, all Red Crescent branches operating in the region are the successors of the Turkish Red Crescent Society.<sup>532</sup> The government's reliance on the Turkish Red Crescent has been subject to both praise and critique. Praise insofar as this relationship reduces the supply chain and capitalizes on the field experience NGOs have to offer: exemplified numerous times by

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<sup>529</sup> Binder, op cit.

<sup>530</sup> Ibid.

<sup>531</sup> Turkish Red Crescent delivers \$2.5 billion of humanitarian aid in 2012, op cit.

<sup>532</sup> The Turkish Red Crescent Society, from past to present. The Magazine of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Accessed through:  
[http://www.redcross.int/EN/mag/magazine2007\\_2/12-13.html](http://www.redcross.int/EN/mag/magazine2007_2/12-13.html) (09/09/2015)

Kızılay who have advocated for and implemented international aid policies.<sup>533</sup> The critiques largely focus on issues of autonomy, claiming that Kızılay has merely become an arm of the government. This latter point is debatable however. Kızılay was established in 1868 under Ottoman rule, but expanded its activities perhaps most prior to the accession of the AKP due to the challenges and opportunities arising from the 1999 earthquake: an internally led transition which increased Kızılay's capacity for disaster management and contributed to their increasingly popular public image.<sup>534</sup> They have consistently shown pragmatism in their relations with various ruling parties, showing that they value effective aid relief over partisanship. That said, perhaps for self-preservationist reasons, there are clear indicators that Kızılay is allied with the AKP, with an anonymous source claiming that "if the international community were to give financial support to the Turkish Red Crescent's efforts in the Syrian crisis, it would be no different to providing this money directly to the Turkish government."<sup>535</sup>

The Turkish Red Crescent's humanitarian campaign in Syria was launched directly by the Prime Minister, Erdoğan, indicative of how centralized and unilateral Turkey's foreign-policy can be. However, this attempt to raise awareness relied upon continual references to, and examples of, the activities of aid organizations, particularly that of the Turkish Red Crescent. They have been the most visible and active Turkish NGO in the Syrian crisis, establishing refugee camps, medical aid, textile aid, education and drinking water/ agricultural assistance. They are also to a degree involved in the decision-making and have been engaged by the government to formulate and enact programmes. For example, in April 2011, alongside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and AFAD, Kızılay implemented the 'Syrian Crisis Humanitarian Assistance Operation'. This is a rapid response programme of education, medical and housing provision for Turkey's ever increasing Syrian refugee community. Kızılay, alongside the IHH, has also been instrumental in the implementation of Turkey's 'zero-point delivery' system, developed as a new (and controversial) approach to humanitarian aid. This entails humanitarian goods being transferred directly from Türk Kızılay to a network of humanitarian NGOs and local councils operating across the border.<sup>536</sup> While being lauded for its efficient coordination of aid, there are concerns over control and management as once the goods are transferred as there are few mechanisms in place to ensure the aid reaches needy populations and are not abused by conflicting groups who have used starvation as a war-strategy as well as aid distribution for hearts-and-minds. Furthermore, Kızılay's increasing interest and

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<sup>533</sup> Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Disaster & Emergency Management Authority, Campaign One Bread, One Blanket for Syria 3rd Consultation and Coordination Meeting Held at AFAD. Accessed through: <https://www.afad.gov.tr/EN/HaberDetay.aspx?ID=5&IcerikID=925> (17/09/2015)

<sup>534</sup> The Turkish Red Crescent Society, from past to present, *op cit.*

<sup>535</sup> Quoted in Binder, *op cit.*

<sup>536</sup> Ibid.

attention to international operations has received domestic criticism from both the media and public due to a concern that this will limit their ability to respond to internal crises.<sup>537</sup>

Kızılay has partnered with AFAD to provide training in disaster management to the Mosul committee, a four-day workshop covering rescue operations, shelter and camp management, humanitarian aid logistics, telecommunications during a disaster and psychosocial services amongst other issues faced in northern Iraq. Furthermore, the Directorate General of Kızılay has been involved in the signing of memorandums of understanding regarding development assistance and humanitarian aid to Iraqi refugees in Syria in 2007 and Iraq and is one of the leading member of the Prime Ministry's Disaster and Emergency Coordination Board.<sup>538</sup> Interestingly, they have also been included in joint civil-military field exercises, coordinated by AFAD and aimed at increasing efficiency and coordination between civil groups and the military in their disaster response. Such exercises are unique to the AKP era and are exemplary of changing leadership dynamics since de-militarization. They have also been involved in multilateral political talks with the EU, UNICEF, Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and AFAD, signing numerous protocols regarding training, child protection and youth (particularly working on psychological support for children suffering from PTSD- part of an international training programme led by Turkey's presidency).<sup>539</sup> This multilateral and multi-level policy-making highlight the increasing globalization of Turkish NGOs.<sup>540</sup>

The Turkish Red Crescent operates with almost unique support from the government and has been integrated at all levels, from policy formation to advocacy and implementation. Their influential position though, which can only be compared to the covert delegation of political roles to the IHH, raises issues over the independence of this organization and their status as a CSO. Considering them as a GNGO alleviates this and makes explicit their ties to the government, however given the institutionalized delegation of responsibility in providing humanitarian assistance for Turkey as an official actor, their material assistance and their strong ties to government agencies, it appears that the Turkish Red Crescent currently operates as a tool of the AKP rather than an actor in their own right. Their focus on former Ottoman territories is reflective of the geopolitical interests and networks of the ruling party and they form a crucial aspect of Turkey's foreign-policy strategy in terms of humanitarian assistance.

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<sup>537</sup> The Turkish Red Crescent Society, from past to present, *op cit*.

<sup>538</sup> Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Disaster & Emergency Management Authority. Disaster Report Syria. Accessed through: <https://www.afad.gov.tr/EN/IcerikDetay1.aspx?ID=16&IcerikID=747> (06/07/2016)

<sup>539</sup> Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Disaster & Emergency Management Authority, Training on 'Psychosocial Effects of Disasters and Psychological Support During Disasters' Organized under the Coordination of our Presidency in Collaboration with DPPI-SEE. Accessed through: <https://www.afad.gov.tr/EN/HaberDetay.aspx?ID=5&IcerikID=907> (07/07/2016)

<sup>540</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Türkiye'nin 2007 Yılı İnsani Yardımları. (Turkey's 2007 Year Humanitarian Aid). Accessed through: [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye\\_nin-2007-yili-insani-yardimlari-\\_bugune-kadar\\_.tr.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye_nin-2007-yili-insani-yardimlari-_bugune-kadar_.tr.mfa)

That said, the assistance they provide has proved invaluable, and their role in forming and implementing aid policies in Gaza and Syria stand out as some of the most tangible examples of civil-society influence in foreign relations. Kızılay's pre-existing capacity and grassroots connections with both local and international actors operating in crisis zones, as well as their ability to mobilize public funds for Turkey's official humanitarian assistance means that the government was highly reliant on them for assistance and advice in the field once the Syrian crisis hit, impelling Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy to be multi-track and often unofficial by nature.<sup>541</sup> Turkey's development and humanitarian aid to the region more broadly is often channelled through the Turkish Red Crescent, seemingly due to their networks and legitimacy as a non-state actor. However, as the chosen vehicle for channelling Turkish aid and with close ties to the AKP, does this imply influence or merely involvement? Given they follow the party line, directives from the government on how and where foreign aid should be delivered, their status as even a GNGO is debatable and they should broadly be considered as a governmental actor.

### **2.34 The International Blue Crescent: The Last Independent Faith-based NGO?**

Standing in stark contrast to the Turkish Red Crescent's *modus operandi*, domestic presence and particularly, close relations with the government is the International Blue Crescent. While relatively unknown within Turkey, from its inception this humanitarian faith-based organization has had a global outlook. Like many Turkish NGOs, the IBC was conceived of humanist and philanthropic impulses in response to the Balkan's crises. Originating from just a few "idealist" businessmen who travelled to the region as individuals to provide emergency humanitarian aid based upon personal moral convictions, this organization has evolved at an impressive pace.<sup>542</sup> Particularly so given the marginalization they have been subject to under the AKP, assertedly due to their apolitical stance.<sup>543</sup> Despite the state's apparent reluctance to engage with them, the IBC has been growing in visibility and geographic scope since their inception. Their mobilization, like many faith-based NGOs was based on various humanitarian crises in this era, including the 1999 earthquakes in Turkey. They espouse the same goals as those found in mainstream HNGOs: to alleviate poverty, hunger and illiteracy through education and development aid.

Despite statements saying otherwise, the IBC does maintain some connections to the policy-making elite both domestically and globally. In 2006 they were elected to the board of directors of the 13<sup>th</sup> General Assembly and also hold Special Consultant Status at the UN Economic and Social Council. Although initially focussed on the Balkans, their geographic focus changed

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<sup>541</sup> Binder., op cit.

<sup>542</sup> International Blue Crescent Relief and Development Foundation. General Information. Accessed through: <https://ibc.org.tr/en/sayfa.php?p=mavihilalvakfi>

<sup>543</sup> Interview with Muzaffer Baca, International Blue Crescent, Istanbul, March 15, 2015.



dramatically after the institutionalization of the organization in 2000. Their first project after which was based in India: an emergency relief operation which continued for two years. Besides India, their main foreign locations have been, Palestine, Iran, Pakistan, northern Iraq, Indonesia and Myanmar. When questioned regarding the regional focus of the organization, IBC's vice president Muzaffer Baca stated that this was for personal reasons as he worked as a journalist in the region for many years prior to the establishment of the IBC, however in terms of the location of their work, they have a similar focus to all the faith-based NGOs explored here showing the importance of humanitarian values in their orientation.<sup>544</sup> Their most widespread mobilization prior to the Syrian crisis was to assist Kurds and Turkmens in northern Iraq in 2003 and then again, in Syria in 2007 where they were one of the primary organizations involved in delivering humanitarian aid and managing/ establishing refugee camps.

The IBC run numerous projects both in Turkey and regionally, focussing primarily on emergency relief and direct humanitarian aid- including construction work targeting schools, food packages, winter packages, hygiene support and housing supplies particularly to Syria and Palestine. Some longer-term projects are run concurrently in conflict zones such as Somalia and Pakistan, offering health care, education, vocational training- particularly for women, construction projects for schools and community meeting spaces, also providing logistical support in the form of school buses and ambulances. They tend to work alongside global NGOs such as International Rescue Committee, Catholic Relief Services and Médecins Sans Frontières but have partnered with some state actors. The most notable state-society collaborative projects led by the IBC were run alongside the US government to offer relief to northern Iraq, and Turkey's AFAD, the Governor of Kilis and the Qatari Red Crescent to provide infrastructure support to Aleppo: one of their largest projects since their inception, providing sanitation, water, hygiene, heat and garbage services to the city. They also work on democracy promotion and peace-building in the Middle East through dialogue and education- particularly focussing on ethnic conflicts based on the Ottoman model of multi-culturalism.<sup>545</sup>

Their efficiency and success during a time of great regional instability makes IBC stand out amongst other similar organizations: particularly so due to their activities in connecting local NGOs, regional authorities and national governments. To provide relief to northern Iraq, the IBC signed working agreements with Turcoman Helping Hands and the Kurdish Democratic Front as their local partners, and nationally, the Turkish Red Crescent, but also with both the KRG and the Turkish government showing the multilateral nature of foreign aid, which implicitly impacts on foreign relations. There was an overt goal of ethnic conflict resolution

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<sup>544</sup> Ibid.

<sup>545</sup> Ibid

within these activities, with IBC claiming that ‘By providing assistance to Kurds and Turcomans (Assyrians and Khaldeans will be added to the list) IBC focuses on the elimination of enmities and misunderstandings between the people in the region.’<sup>546</sup> Looking at the Turkish government’s response to the Syrian refugee crisis and centralization of control over camp management, the IBC’s role in the operations, logistics, communications, administration and decision-making regarding camps for Iraqi refugees is significant and indicative that at least during the first two terms, the AKP was willing to secede policy implementation responsibilities to non-state actors.

It is notable that since 2010 the IBC has ended almost all other projects and works only in Turkey, Syria and northern Iraq, providing emergency relief to Syrian refugees and IDPs. The IBC first began operations in Syria in 2007, before the crisis and prior to the mass mobilization of Turkish humanitarian NGOs in the region. After signing cooperation protocols with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and Al Amal, and with the official work permission of the Syrian government (only the fourth INGO to gain such permission), the IBC began projects in education, capacity building and civil-society training initiatives (which it ran concurrently in Iraq and Iran) and emergency aid for Iraqi refugees in Syria. They worked closely with Syrian officials and the UN to determine the form and implementation of emergency aid.<sup>547</sup> Central to the efficiency and success of this project was the opening of communication and interaction channels between state, local authorities and NGOs.<sup>548</sup> These transnational and multi-level networks highlight the field flexibility of NGOs, and their growing ability to work with high-level actors in policy circles to implement foreign aid.

Their construction of multi-level transnational networks appears to have been successful as IBC are now one of the only agencies able to provide cross-border relief and the only Turkish NGO with offices still open in Damascus and Aleppo. Although they claim to have no direct channels of communication with the regime, the continued operations of IBC in this crisis zone are indicative that the regime has given them *de facto* recognition/ protection. Furthermore, despite this claim during interviews, data from their projects archive shows that they have coordinated with the Syrian Ministry of Education to provide education start-up kits and financial support to Syrian and Iraqi IDPs. They have also worked closely with the Governorate of Al Raqqa to provide 45,000 essential non-food-item kits in October 2013, as

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<sup>546</sup> Emergency Appeal-Iraq. *Relief Web*. February 18, 2003. Accessed through: <http://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/emergency-appeal-iraq> (07/08/2015)

<sup>547</sup> Syria Iraqi Refugees Situation Report and IBC activities, July 1, 2007. Accessed through: [http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/62F39721C820C50185257325005C1D96-Full\\_Report.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/62F39721C820C50185257325005C1D96-Full_Report.pdf)

<sup>548</sup> Support for the Iraqi refugees in Syria, Report from International Blue Crescent Relief and Development Foundation. Accessed through: <http://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/support-iraqi-refugees-syria> (07/08/2015)

well as conduct needs assessment reports and carry out capacity building.<sup>549</sup> Knowing the extremely unstable political climate at this time, it is likely IBC had to coordinate with rebel forces to do so, including al-Nusra or ISIS, both of whom had control over vast swathes of the area at that time.<sup>550</sup>

Given Turkey's total discontinuation of official relations with the regime and many rebel groups, the ongoing activities of IBC in Syria are both unique and revealing. Such independence in their engagements with regional state and non-state actors underline why IBC, alongside NGOs such as Kimse Yok Mu, have been subject to increasing governmental attacks and marginalization. Their ability to pursue their own interests at the level of foreign affairs challenges the monopoly of government control and moreover, contests the legitimacy of prevailing discourses and practices associated with 'national interest'. Unlike the organizations discussed previously, the IBC does not have a role in policy formation or implementation of ODA. That said, as with the IHH and KYM, their aid practices abroad do constitute an unofficial element of Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy. Moreover, they, like the government, appear to focus aid along ethnic and religious lines, showing that even amongst organizations with little to no relations with the AKP, shared identity and nationalist motivations lead to similar activities in the fields of foreign aid. Thus, although IBC can be characterised as independent, similarities in their activities, motivation and mission show that the defining feature of faith-based NGO – humanitarian and faith-based values – negate much of the differentiation of GNGO and InNGO discussed early and highlights the importance of ideational affinity with the AKP for the increasingly capacity and visibility of these actors in foreign relations.

### **3. Enacting Humanitarian Diplomacy through NGOs: The Limits of Influence**

Based on the above analysis and compared with chapters three and four, it is clear that faith-based NGOs more than any other civil-society actor in Turkey are having an impact on foreign relations. They benefit from a few core characteristics which enable them to take a more active role in policy implementation rather than simply advocacy, informing or lobbying. The first and foremost reason has been discussed throughout: the issue of identity. With similar agendas, characteristics and goals as the AKP, even assertedly independent faith-based NGOs such as the International Blue Crescent rarely come in to conflict with the ruling party and thus can continue their work relatively immune to government interventions. Humanitarian

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<sup>549</sup> International Blue Crescent Relief and Development Foundation, Projects Information. Accessed through: <https://ibc.org.tr/en/sayfa.php?p=projectbudget>

<sup>550</sup> Al-Raqqa Under Attack, Amnesty International Report, 2015. Accessed through: [http://www.amnesty.org.uk/sites/default/files/al-raqqa\\_under\\_attack\\_0.pdf](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/sites/default/files/al-raqqa_under_attack_0.pdf) (15/07/2015)

diplomacy is being outsourced to faith-based NGOs and they have emerged as one of the most visible sources of, and actors in this new foreign-policy strategy.

Faith-based NGOs pursue numerous activities which overlap with the government. Emergency assistance, infrastructure and capacity building and medical relief to name but a few. Such an increase in aid activities has necessitated a broad coalition of domestic and international partners working in the field: indicated in the table below detailing the financial capacity of Turkish faith-based NGOs. Turkey channels humanitarian assistance predominantly through multilateral organizations (56 %) and NGOs (26 %) followed by the public sector (7 %) and the Red Cross (6 %).<sup>551</sup> Together with governmental initiatives in peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction, this forms Turkey's "civilian capacity", referring to the groups of civilians involved in overseas conflicts or crises coordinated by the government, including both the public and private sectors and thus civil-society- particularly aid workers.<sup>552</sup>

Grafik-23: EN ÇOK YARDIM YAPAN STK'LAR (MİLYON DOLAR)

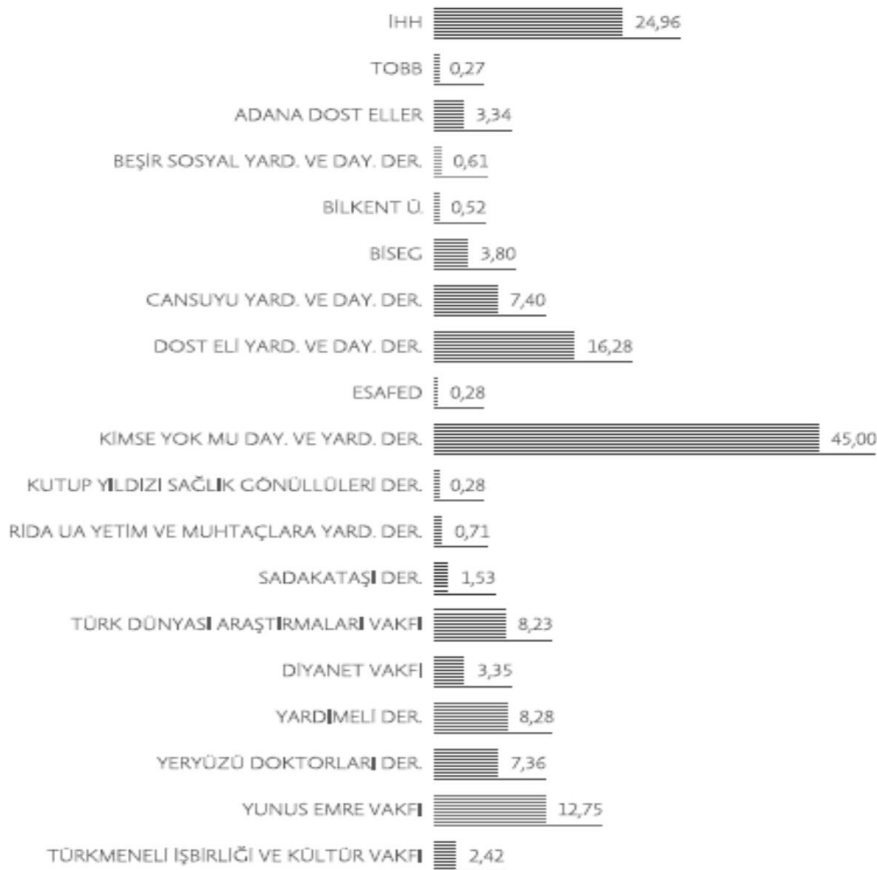


Figure 1: Total annual aid by Turkish NGOs (million USD)<sup>553</sup>

<sup>551</sup> Ibid, p.10

<sup>552</sup> P. Keating., and S. Wiharta. (2013). Synthesis Report of the Baseline Study on Civilian Capacity: A CIVCAP Network Joint Research Project, p.3.

<sup>553</sup> Turkey's Development Assistance Report, 2012, op cit., pp.9-13.

Turkey's 'civilian capacity' is now a crucial element of ODA, due to a number of field advantages which will be discussed below. That said, with the obvious and enduring dominance of governmental actors in defining the scope and orientation of TFP, it is important to underscore what the benefits of integrating faith-based NGOs into humanitarian diplomacy are: exploring what role they can play in reality, how and why governmental actors are supporting them and whether they have a subservient or independent relationship with the state. After identifying the potential impact of NGOs, this section will explore issues in coordination, resources and motivations behind the humanitarian diplomacy paradigm in TFP.

One of faith-based NGOs' defining features, as seen in particular seen in the cases of the IHH and the IBC, is that they are extremely flexible in their areas of work. This does not just mean geographically, although they certainly work in more countries than any other CSO and in some cases, more than the government itself. They are flexible in the type of work they engage in, spanning from medical services to education to aid. Moreover, they are highly flexible in their networks and engagement, working with a multitude of actors from grassroots organizations to foreign governments and international agencies. This at times has led to questions regarding faith-based NGOs 'civil' status, as discussed per the IHH and their alleged relations with terrorist groups, however in general, the flexibility of faith-based NGOs is discussed as a distinct advantage vis-à-vis state actors. The IHH's position as a GNGO, while tenuous under the civil-society category due to their alleged links to armed groups, shows the possible uses of non-state actors for government's when diplomatic channels are closed. Their mediation in Syria and negotiations for the release of prisoners held by the Syrian intelligence are a prime example of the flexibility and impact faith-based NGOs can have.

As well as flexibility, faith-based NGOs have high levels of visibility and legitimacy due to their long-term field activities. In many cases, faith-based NGOs were found to be pursuing longer-term projects than that of the state. While TIKA and AFAD primarily focus on emergency aid, NGOs are providing sustainable education and training, medical aid and capacity building. While the government is also involved in long-term aid practices, this is relatively recent, coming alongside the 'Economic and Technical Cooperation Package' adopted in 2015. TIKA has increased capacity building activities exponentially in recent years, however still notes that they rely on partners (largely International NGOs) to do this, highlighting the importance of domestic NGOs in representing Turkey abroad.<sup>554</sup> Interview data and statements from aid recipients reflected a very positive view of Turkey abroad based on aid activities, many of which were led by non-state actors however perceived as Turkish,

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<sup>554</sup> Turkey's cooperation with the Least Developed Countries, TIKA Report on the Turkey's Economic and Technical Cooperation Package for the LDCs, 2016., Department for External Affairs and Partnerships. Accessed through: <http://www.tika.gov.tr/upload/publication/LDC.pdf>, p.4

showing the impact of NGOs.<sup>555</sup> As well as providing new channels for interaction in the field, faith-based NGOs can provide services in a relatively benign or apolitical manner as opposed to the government. Whereas governmental aid is often accompanied by conditionality, NGOs offer aid on a needs-based assessment due to the benefits of private donations. Faith-based NGOs have and can play an important role in mobilizing cultural and religious values amongst their conservative support base to garner donations and expand their aid capacity. That said, there are domestic factors that drive the direction and level of aid, explaining the overt focus on the Middle East in Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy. Aid is determined not only by need, despite this being the overarching narrative of all interviewees. It is directed by domestic interest and by the government's foreign-policy priorities, showing that while faith-based NGOs are often perceived as apolitical actors, they are involved in the implementation of TFP at the government's behest, particularly true of GNGOs, which risks politicizing aid.<sup>556</sup>

This is not to imply that NGOs are merely intermediary agents assisting and channelling the state's interests and policies. In fact, faith-based NGOs have carved out an autonomous space for themselves and play a very direct role on the ground, both on the management side and in terms of implementing and in some case influencing policy. The state has a clear economic advantage but despite their relatively limited economic capacity, NGOs boast alternative advantages. According to SETA analyst Ufuk Ulutaş, the benefit of these organizations is that "they're in touch with the ground. They're not talking from Ankara, they go out to the region. Almost all of them bring their own recommendations and views on things our government is dealing with... Civil-society organizations are the real actors that are seen by these people... They open up spaces, make diplomatic opportunities for the foreign-policy establishment and then they [the government] come and do whatever they do as diplomats."<sup>557</sup> While this certainly paints a picture of a thriving civil-society, independent from the state and flexible in their alliances and activities, their integration into the government's official development activities and *de facto* status as representatives of Turkey abroad means that faith-based NGOs are deviating from the more traditional role of CSOs discussed in chapter one. The issue here is despite the independence of these organizations, their shared identity and activities with the government in the sphere of humanitarian aid runs the risk of NGOs being overtaken by the more dominant discourses and priorities of the government. This raises the relationship

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<sup>555</sup> Interviews with KYM, IHH, IBC and anonymous representative of the Somali Ministry of Interior and Federal Affairs, op cit.

<sup>556</sup> Aras and Akpınar, op cit.

<sup>557</sup> Interview with Ulutaş, op cit.

between aid and politics in Turkey's foreign relations, highlighting the politicization of aid and the hegemonic status of faith-based NGOs.<sup>558</sup>

In terms of their advocacy, faith-based NGOs have the potential to play a vital role in garnering public donations, support and sympathy for humanitarian causes.<sup>559</sup> Their discourses and practices in alleviating human suffering and poverty, and advocating for human rights, religious moderation and freedom, continually keep humanitarian issues on the agenda, particularly visible during religious holidays and at crisis points. The Iraqi and Syrian refugee crises are two of the most prominent examples of effective coordination between official and unofficial humanitarian assistance. The government, civil-society and business mobilized to deliver aid and emergency relief to the region. Furthermore, the early mobilization of CSOs and the government's later reliance on their field experience, capability and local connections opened the door for further cooperation between public, civil and private organizations, with the government implementing the majority of their humanitarian assistance through non-state channels, though notably this is almost solely through the IHH and the Turkish Red Crescent as GNGOs, raising issues of autonomy and pluralism.

Despite the opportunities offered by what should be seen as a more pluralistic policy implementation environment, the issues mentioned above regarding the integration of faith-based NGOs into the AKP's political project raise questions over autonomy and actual influence. Where there has been diffusion of foreign aid implementation responsibility to faith-based NGOs, with them taking a lead in bottom-up peacebuilding and grassroots aid delivery, their close ties to government, business and other interest groups means that aid is never benign and still forms a constitutive aspect of the AKP's political project. Moreover, if we can take the involvement of multiple non-state actors into foreign-policy at face value, there are additional problems in coordination and efficiency. The activities of faith-based NGOs are to a degree coordinated by government institutions. The most prominent organizations involved in the deliverance of Turkey's official development aid (ODA) and humanitarian assistance are TIKA, the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD), and the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet – a notably expansion in their remit from previous years). The expansion of bureaucratic institutions involved in humanitarian assistance has accompanied the expansion of the NGO sector, with TIKA and AFAD – only established in 2009 – now attempting to delegate, coordinate and enforce government regulations on these actors in their activities abroad. TIKA for example, although established in 1992, has undergone a rapid expansion both in remit and scope over the last decade. The regional focus of TIKA has

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<sup>558</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Final Declaration of the Fifth Annual Ambassadors Conference.

Accessed through: [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/final\\_declaration\\_of\\_the\\_fifth\\_annual\\_ambassadors\\_conference.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/final_declaration_of_the_fifth_annual_ambassadors_conference.en.mfa) (09/03/2015)

<sup>559</sup> Engin Akçay. Bir Dış Politika Enstrümanı Olarak Türkiye'nin Dış Yardımları (Turkey's Foreign

Aid as an Instrument of Foreign-policy). Ankara: Turgut Özal Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2012.

concurrently expanded. Beginning in the Balkans and Central Asia, TIKAs are now active across the Middle East, Africa and Asia.

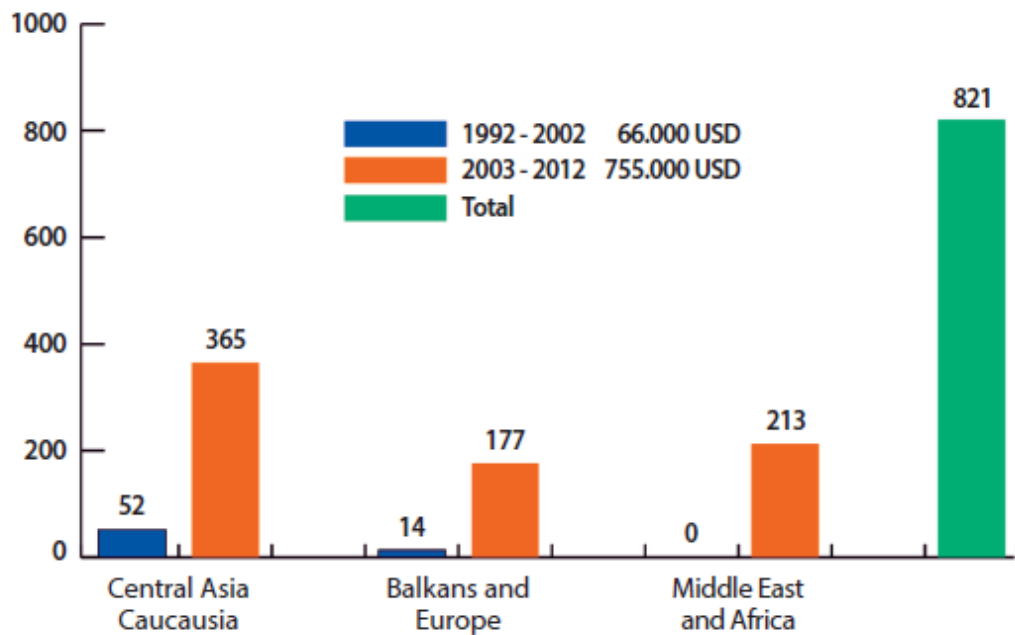


Figure 2: Regional Distribution of TIKAs Spending 2002-2012.<sup>560</sup>

Turkey's expanding relations with the Muslim world can be viewed by looking at the distribution of TIKAs projects, which although conceived of to focus on development of ex-Soviet states, has evolved its focus and re-directed it towards MENA in recent years. TIKAs and Islamic NGOs tend to concentrate their work in the same areas so as to share resources and knowledge. This is a symbiotic relationship with NGOs following TIKAs on some occasions and *vice versa*. TIKAs in fact delivers and implements its development aid programmes primarily through Islamic NGOs due to their well-established local connections and capacity, particularly in the health sphere.<sup>561</sup> For example, the IHH is one of the key routes through which TIKAs delivers healthcare. TIKAs and AFAD, in its relative infancy, now struggle in their tasks as mediating bodies coordinating the technocratic and political aspects of development aid and humanitarian assistance respectively. Such issues are compounded by the financial and operational autonomy of involved NGOs. Furthermore, with NGOs specializing in a few key areas such as medical relief and education, over-reliance on these organizations could be detrimental to Turkey forming a more holistic and sustainable aid policy.<sup>562</sup> Turkish bureaucracy seemingly lacks the institutional capacity for this multi-level coordination across such a wide geography and despite the political coordination offered by

<sup>560</sup> C. Haşimi. (2014). Turkey's Humanitarian Diplomacy and Development Cooperation. *Insight Turkey*, 16(1), 127-145.

<sup>561</sup> Aras and Akpınar, op cit, p.235

<sup>562</sup> Ibid, p.241.



the foreign ministry, AFAD and TIKA struggle from coordination problems in the absence of reliable monitoring and evaluation protocols.<sup>563</sup>

Turkish NGOs have been working in some areas in Africa and Asia longer than the government and thus have well established connections and facilitate subsequent government involvement. This raises the capacity of faith-based NGOs to expand the reach and geographies of TFP. Ulutaş argued that there is not a single “Turkish embassy that can work without an NGO in Africa. It’s the dynamos of political activity over there... Without their [civil-society] involvement the embassies would be nothing. They have a very good relationship, NGOs and embassies. This has started to work very well. Turkey’s foreign aid has increased dramatically related to this.”<sup>564</sup> Statements such as these have been reiterated by a number of Turkish academics working on peacebuilding and aid such as Bulent Aras, however ties to the AKP indicated that this could still be the intended portrayal rather than reality. That said, acclaims over their status and role do fit with broader scholarship on this area, which argues that the informal nature of NGOs gives them better public relations and communications in the field, allowing them to more successfully contribute to long-term socio-political development.<sup>565</sup> The presence of faith-based NGOs during the onset of crises, their delivery of emergency supplies, endows them with high visibility internationally and helps foster inter-personal relations needed to sustain long-term development. Furthermore, they are not as constrained by bureaucracy and as such, are able to conduct their activities in a more efficient and flexible manner than is possible through formal interstate relations, developing more direct (if informal) relations and channels of communication between (and within) societies and states. This is an important aspect of conflict resolution and peace-building strategy as was seen in the case of Turkish Red Crescent and the International Blue Crescent.

Although beneficial in many ways, this informality does have some drawbacks. Conducting and developing foreign relations and public policy in this manner means that there are few institutionalized control mechanisms, increasing the risk of corruption, mismanagement and bribery. Similarly, as face-to-face contact seems to be the primary medium of communication and thus influence, there is a lack of transparency which lends itself to the privileging of elite decision-making and un-democratic practices.<sup>566</sup> A further issue is that governmental donors deliver aid on a demand-basis making long-term planning and effective strategy building in

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<sup>563</sup> Keyman and Sazak, op cit., p.7

<sup>564</sup> Interview with Ulutaş, op cit.

<sup>565</sup> See Jacob Bercovitch and Richard Jackson, *Conflict Resolution in the Twenty-First Century: Principles, Methods and Approaches*, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2012, p.168; and Michael Schloms. "Humanitarian NGOs in peace processes." *International Peacekeeping* 10, no. 1 (2003): 40-55.

<sup>566</sup> Interview with Akgun, op cit.

aid policy difficult if not impossible. Although in aid projects in Africa, this issue is not so acute, Turkey's humanitarian engagement in the Middle East suffers from a lack of effective management and policy planning. There is a lack of coordination between non-governmental and governmental agencies which perpetuates the continued autonomy of NGOs in the field, even for those who do not share close relations with the government such as the International Blue Crescent, as they are not confined or controlled effectively by comprehensive policy or a hierarchical political structure. Although this could certainly be viewed as beneficial by civil-society actors, it does raise issues with transparency and long-term planning for aid policy.

Regardless, by building wells, roads, hospitals and schools, faith-based NGOs have become emblematic of Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy, enhancing the legitimacy and credibility of Turkey's regional power ambitions. As we can see from the above analysis, faith-based NGOs have some key advantages making them such an active agent of TFP. Their flexibility, expertise, local networks and capacity being foremost. The expansion of these organizations under the AKP is worthy of note in and of itself, however there remain key issues in the institutionalization of aid practices, coordination and checks and balances.<sup>567</sup> Faith-based NGOs operate largely at a grassroots level, providing low-level support to official humanitarian activities in peacebuilding and aid, using their networks with local communities to deliver aid, infrastructure support and pursue trust-building initiatives. With the aid activities of faith-based NGOs now recognized as an official instrument of foreign-policy, termed by the IPC as 'civilian capacity' and coordinated as part of Turkey's ODA, it is clear that despite the issues explored above, they are having a sustainable and quantifiable impact on foreign relations under the AKP.

#### **4. Conclusions**

This chapter has explored empirically the involvement of faith-based NGOs in international aid, peacekeeping, development and conflict resolution, identifying this as perhaps the most significant and quantifiable inclusion of CSOs in foreign-policy strategy and outlook under the AKP. There was little to no comparison made with previous eras in this chapter unlike in the preceding ones, as this is a development unique to the AKP era: illustrative of the core argument made in this thesis regarding what is 'new' in TFP being the actors, discourses and strategies, in this case, the much-lauded humanitarian diplomacy paradigm, of which faith-based NGOs are a, if not *the* constitutive force. The government has received international acclaim for their humanitarian activities, and faith-based NGOs have become legitimate actors with global outreach, their activities even considered as part of Turkey's Official Development

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<sup>567</sup> Aras and Akpınar, op cit., p.241.

Assistance and nation brand. Faith-based NGOs, alongside the state and the Community forming a triangular bloc behind Turkey's humanitarian assistance. That said, there are a number of issues in the developing model of paralleled official and unofficial humanitarian aid as discussed above and recent years, particularly since Mavi Marmara and the Gülen split have seen a rising tension in how to institutionalize and control these individual actors. The conclusion will first discuss and summarize the key changes spanning from the rise of faith-based NGOs before tackling the problems which have arisen since 2010.

As discussed in the previous chapter, much of the AKP's foreign-policy, particularly regional economic integration and rapprochement, is not in fact 'new' but rather the continuation of policies and strategies pursued during the Özal era. However, in the spheres of humanitarian aid and diplomacy, Turkey has adopted a foreign-policy style and orientation unique to this era, both discursively and practically. It is within this sphere and prior to the Arab Spring that Turkey can be said to have undergone a true transformation in foreign-policy, as hypothesized in the introduction, adopting the style and stance of a humanitarian diplomat, with this diplomacy being in large part enacted and informed by faith-based NGOs: supporting the two core arguments made in this thesis. As argued throughout this thesis, the 'transformation' of TFP and increasing influence of non-state actors was restrained to three core areas. Firstly, orientation, seen in this chapter through Turkey's growing engagement in humanitarian crises in the Middle East and Africa rather than the traditional Eastern-European engagements. Further in strategy, with Turkish NGO activism encouraged either to pave the way for greater diplomatic and economic relations or as a channel when track I diplomacy failed, as with the case of Syria and Hamas. Finally, in discourses and image, with strong parallels found in the humanitarian discourses and practices of the state and faith-based NGOs, most obviously in the case of humanitarian diplomacy and the IHH. Although there were a few examples of the government following or relying on NGOs found, such as the IHH's mediation activities and overall aid and relief work in Syria, generally, faith-based humanitarian NGOs have a complementary but ancillary role to play in peacebuilding, conflict resolution, mediation and development aid. Although they are very visible in a few of these spheres due to publicity of their humanitarian aid and strong grassroots connections with local communities, the most important activities they undertake are advocacy; raising awareness, communication, and implementation and in providing emergency relief and development aid for, or in addition to the government.

Alongside their growing role in sourcing and implementing emergency assistance and medical aid, faith-based NGOs are pursuing projects in infrastructure and investing in social and human capital through education. This is one of the key contributions of faith-based NGOs, fostering societal-ties needed for low-level peacebuilding and supplementing official interactions, and supports the broader claims made in this thesis regarding the often intangible but influential

impact of increased CSO activism under the AKP. While not an across the board rule, as is clear in the IHH's impact on Turkish-Israeli relations, in general, the existence of societal level relations through education, cultural exchanges and religious spheres are believed to be a crucial component of peacebuilding. As with Iraq, which has been one of the biggest recipients of Turkish aid, the activities of track II, unofficial peacebuilding and diplomacy are a less visible but underlying societal foundations for Turkey's approach to regional conflict resolution and expanding influence in the region, showing the dual motivations of interest and identity in TFP and the constitutive factors behind the humanitarian diplomacy in TFP. The subsequent increase in the government's official activities in these spheres cannot be deemed causal due to a lack of data, however it certainly seems that the government and faith-based NGOs are pursuing parallel and complimentary development policies abroad which gives some clues as to a growing pluralism and reliance on civil-society capacity due to the field advantages discussed in section three.

Faith-based NGOs are at the forefront of humanitarian missions abroad due to their public legitimacy and visibility discussed as above, but also due to their successful instrumentalization of religion as a normative and resonant discourse to mobilize aid through Muslim solidarity. Furthermore, their activities have produced the ideational resources for Turkey's official aid activities, promoting liberal norms such as human rights, gender empowerment and peace, also voiced by organizations which would generally be categorized as conservative. Faith-based NGOs in Turkey generally implement projects similar to those of their counterparts in international HNGOs, however emphasis on religious and cultural values was found to be the defining difference. Further, and interconnected with this, is their *de facto* position as representatives of Turkey abroad, and their active and willing participation in Turkey's nation branding as a humanitarian power. Their status as such, as well as grassroots connections and use of transnational networks based on identity has given them credibility and access to policy makers and enabled them to expand their scope and involvement in international affairs: however it is important to note that this is often due to the close ideational affinity faith-based NGOs share with the AKP: identified as the core condition of influence throughout. Their growth is inherently connected to this pro-Islamic government, just as many of the successes boasted by the AKP regarding their position as a donor state, successful soft-power and regional prestige won through Mavi Marmara are rooted in the activities of faith-based NGOs. Given transformations in the outlook and strategy of Turkish diplomacy, transitioning towards humanitarian, public and cultural forms of it, this mutually beneficial relationship explains the trajectory of both the AKP and faith-based NGOs, whose interests and ideational objectives have aligned.

The level of conformity they exhibit with official policy is contentious and highlights a lack of plurality in Turkey's humanitarian assistance. The organizations that have risen to the fore

in Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy reign almost solely from conservative segments of society, who benefit from close or organic ties to the government enjoy preferential treatment whereas those who oppose the status quo or take an apolitical stance are marginalized. As such, the increasing role of certain NGOs within public and foreign-policy is not necessarily indicative of democratization, nor of pluralism, but rather of the ongoing presence of clientelism and patronage networks in Turkey: creating a new non-state policy-making elite. However, this is not absolute and as has been shown through the case studies and data in this thesis, even organizations who constitute political opposition to the AKP have been able to continue their activities abroad with relative impunity to domestic dynamics such as Kimse Yok Mu. This shows the empowerment of faith-based NGOs, which are increasingly outside of governmental control as was seen with the IHH, yet their activities continue to form a significant, if unofficial and occasionally unwanted, aspect of Turkey's soft-power, nation branding and international image. The AKP has benefitted from the unique soft-power instruments offered by civil-society groups, both materially and ideationally, and consequently these organizations have gained the legitimacy and the capacity needed to emerge as serious political actors in the international sphere.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusion**

My original question and theoretical assumptions arose from the societal transformations Turkey underwent in the early to mid-2000s. From a country dominated by the military, with historic conflict and societal apathy and distrust towards the Middle East to an emerging western-style democracy, with an increasingly vibrant civic space that appeared particularly focussed on the Middle East. I wanted to understand the growing economic, social and political ties that were reaching out towards the region, not only from a top-down institutional perspective, but from more organic and grassroots organizations that, given the history of coups and chaotic coalition rule in Turkey, may be more sustainable than government initiatives. My theoretical and methodological approach towards solving the question of if, how and why civil-society actors were branching out into foreign relations with the Middle East was to focus on the three most active and influential groups in Turkey under the neoliberal/ Islamist AKP government: business associations, think tanks and faith-based NGOs, exploring them as explanatory variables and actors in Turkey's 'new' foreign-policy using historical materialist, sociological and political economy perspectives to understand this relationship.

To ascertain their role, and solve the question of whether civil-society activities were influential in Turkey's expanding or 'transforming' relations with the Middle East, this first required a thorough historical overview primarily detailing the contrary or simultaneous explanations of how these ties grew. Secondly, it required substantial sociological investigation into the characteristics, aims and activities of CSOs, showing the variation between CSOs and their increasing presence as a politicized and internationalized actor. Thirdly, it required case study research to be compared and contrasted with the previous historical information cited regarding Turkey's relations with Middle Eastern countries, to reveal if, how and when CSOs had influenced change in foreign relations. To that end, fourteen in-depth case studies of CSOs in Turkey were conducted, showing the interaction between these groups and the state, their activities and strategies in the sphere of foreign relations and their actual influence vis-à-vis the liberal 'ideal' literature on civil society, divided based on the type of CSO, be it GNGO, BNGO or InNGO. This final chapter will brief the main findings regarding whether the AKP has indeed implemented 'new' foreign-policy towards the Middle East following the three empirical chapters on business associations, think tanks and Islamic NGOs, the emergence and influence of civil-society related to this and CSOs' relations with the state, critiquing whether they have been influential in foreign-policy orientation, strategies and style under the AKP. I will then note areas for further research based on changes beyond the scope of this thesis.

Centred upon Turkey's unique geopolitics, Turkey has re-established historic ties with neighbours, joining a number of regional organizations and emerging as a regional power. In doing so, it has been argued that Turkey has shifted its axis away from the West and Israel and engaged in a new activism in the Middle East, largely through economic diplomacy. However, as has been argued throughout, rather than being indicative of an axis shift, these moves are largely consistent with, although expanded upon, economic and diplomatic initiatives from the 1980s and 1990s, a prevalent theme in the political economy literature which left an open question as to what is changing TFP. Furthermore, Turkey has in fact adopted a broadly Western approach as a global power operating in the Middle East, utilising historic and cultural ties as well as trade and investment to contribute to regional stability and economic growth. Turkey's role as a regional mediator, implementing reconciliation initiatives between Israel and Syria, as well as with Iran and its rapprochement efforts with Greece and Armenia illustrates a convergence of economic considerations and diplomatic activities consistent with previous eras. As such, what is 'new' in TFP is the economic rather than security focus which entailed, for a time, a more pluralistic and multidimensional form of foreign relations. This is rooted in the changing global context of TFP in the post-Cold War era, but also precipitated by the strengthening of domestic actors: the AKP and new economic elites.

Economic integration and interdependence through trade and FDI became one of the main pillars of foreign-policy under the AKP's first two terms, particularly focused on old Ottoman geographies. Essentially there was an emerging consensus that Turkey's economic and foreign-policy interests could best be served by expanding multi-dimensional ties, engaging groups at all levels, from business to civil-society groups both domestically and abroad. The AKP's experimentation with economic liberalization, democratization and Islam catalysed the emergence of a new business elite with transnational networks particularly in the Middle East. As discussed in chapter three, Turkey's newly internationalized business class have emerged at the core of Turkey's foreign and economic policy reorientation towards the region. Moreover, they managed to collaboratively dismantle the old secular military elite, replacing hostile, securitized relations with economic, social and political coalitions. Due to many of these actors' geographical proximity to, and cultural affinity with, the Middle East, their new domestic economic power has undoubtedly facilitated the AKP's efforts to re-conceptualize Turkey's Middle Eastern relations, providing legitimacy, channels of interaction and material resources as shown in chapters three, four and five. Due to the global economic transformations explored in chapter three, business associations were able and willing to aggressively pursue their interests at a domestic and international level with shifting economic alliances found to have a considerable impact on the style of the AKP's foreign-policy implementation, which for a time took on a more multidimensional and multilevel outlook: the nation-brand behind the AKP's 'new' diplomatic engagements.

During this period, business associations acted as an important although oft ancillary and informal aspect of official Turkish foreign-policy initiatives towards rapprochement. Essentially, foreign-policy was domesticated and driven from the bottom up in some circumstances, which while a limited change, was found to be distinct from the highly securitized and closed nature of foreign-policy in previous eras, dominated by the NSC. This is not only due to systemic transformative processes such as democratization and Europeanization opening a space for civil-society influence, but further, due to economic issues related to energy, tourism and expanding export markets as was discussed extensively in chapter three. The main critique in this chapter being that influence was found to be restrained to institutionalized, hierarchical organizations that enter bargaining processes with the state within existing structures. This means that organizations are in fact co-opted to a degree, used in ensuring the continued dominance of the AKP's political project to the detriment of a more plural, transparent and accountable policy environment, as discussed regarding the Gramscian critique of these actors. While conflicting interests were found over specific policy issues, the system of advanced capitalism in Turkey and elsewhere is maintained and facilitated by the economic and political lobbying of these privileged associations. This was particularly true of business associations, which through their close and often clientalistic relations with the state, disenfranchise a number of opposition CSOs from policy-making as the contribute to the image of pluralistic decision-making, but within a very narrow set of interests that are largely aligned with those of the state.

That said, following EU-led democratization and desecuritization, especially changes to the Law on Associations, Turkish civil-society evolved in size and scope under the first two AKP administrations beyond the limitations of elite, economic groups discussed above. Their offices and number of employees grew, and with it, their areas of interest, role, functions, effectiveness and reach. Starting from a predominantly Western-facing EU-funded civil-society, the Middle East became the new area of focus for many of these organizations and their growing number of experts. This is for several reasons, first and foremost of which was political will. The AKPs early signalling to civil-society groups (particularly business associations) that they were willing to include actors aligned with their own interests to a degree enforced the Middle East as a policy focus for CSOs, with think tanks such as IPC and USAK seeking greater input at both the domestic and international level. Although think tanks were the least obvious or tangible force within foreign affairs, their role was found to be influential in more subtle ways: central to which is their research and communications activities. Research from foreign-policy think tanks is carefully constructed and disseminated in a manner palatable to decision-makers, the public and the media. They play a kind of intermediary role, brokering, negotiating and informing behind the scenes. Given the lack of analysis of the role of foreign-policy think tanks in Turkey (and more broadly), this chapter



represents a first attempt to systematize, and offer extensive empirical insights, based on liberal theories of influence, the impact of these organizations in the Turkish context and theoretically. This analysis has allowed me to identify types of Turkish think tanks and use this categorization to draw conclusion regarding patterns of interaction, and the degree of influence they have had over the time-period offered. They have indirectly caused changes in the ideas, interests and priorities involves in TFP and played the most significant role in liberalizing Turkey's quasi-authoritarian political regime, with consequences for relations with the Middle East. However, they also played the most intangible role and thus, data showing impact on changes in TFP resulting from think tanks' policy output was limited.

Think tanks' notable autonomy from the government and significant efforts in pursuing democratic reform at home and abroad was distinct from the dominant conservative business associations and faith-based NGOs discussed in chapters three and five. As well as benefiting from organic ties with the Islamist government, certain groups (notably MÜSİAD, Kimse Yok Mu and the IHH) were backed by, or formed from the local capital of devout businessmen and the AKP elite. The government's electoral base and personal relations were found to be the most convincing explanation of enhanced policy influence for these groups as opposed to the institutionalized influence mechanisms enjoyed by think tanks, supported by shared socio-cultural backgrounds and aims. Islamic business, both individuals and the business associations examined in chapter three such as MÜSİAD and TUSKON (prior to the Gülen split) were heavily integrated in regions which provided electoral support for the AKP. Faith-based NGOs were similarly well integrated in the AKP's grassroots support base, raising large amounts of money, particularly during religious holidays, for foreign aid campaigns. This public mobilization benefited the government, appeasing domestic pressure and fulfilling Turkey's projected image as a humanitarian diplomat, as faith-based NGOs were often perceived as representative of Turkey abroad. This was also true for Gülen projects. Schools funded by the Community in Palestine, as well as humanitarian aid initiatives in Somalia were not distinguished by local communities as separate from Turkish government assistance. However, the lack of clarity in distinguishing state and non-state actors and their independence abroad has had both positive and negative consequences for Turkey's nation brand as a humanitarian power.

Faith-based NGOs, due to their decentralized and autonomous nature, were found to be both more mobile and more flexible in their interactions in the field than governmental officials, maintaining access to a wider range of actors many of whom officials are unable to legitimately contact such as the IHH and their purported links to radical groups. There are two important critiques related to this point however. Firstly, the aforementioned lack of distinction between state and non-state actors, and the dependency of the AKP's image as a humanitarian diplomat and regional mediator on said actors, was shown to be extremely vulnerable once relations

between these groups changed, as discussed regarding the Gülen split. Secondly, the autonomy of these organizations means that they are not accountable in many cases and to once again site the issue of IHH, impact upon international affairs in a manner which is detrimental to Turkey's national interest such as during the Mavi Marmara affair. Both these issues have had a destabilizing impact on Turkey's domestic dynamics and international image, which while illustrating the potential power and impact of CSOs, equally demonstrates the instability of the same without formalized mechanisms of influence, a democratic environment and transparency, challenging the liberal ideal theoretical type of CSOs.

The core issue identified in civil-society influence, as discussed throughout in detail, was of the socio-cultural alignment of dominant CSOs and the AKP. The ideological similarity of these groups has been a core reason for the enhanced policy influence of most CSOs, although with the exception of think tanks, which renders their activities not as a force for progressive social change but rather a force in entrenching and perpetuating state power, which supports the Gramscian critique of civil-society as discussed in the introduction. That said, and as discussed in the introduction, CSOs are not understood here as inherently a democratizing force, but rather, in line with neo-Gramscian theories, a part of the state's hegemonic political project. While that certainly undermines their value and autonomy, it does not negate influence per se. GNGOs such as MÜSIAD, TUSKON, SETA, USAK, the IHH, the Turkish Red Crescent and ORSAM have helped shape, legitimize and implement a foreign-policy reflective of the AKP's ideology. But while democratization may not be the *raison d'être* for these organizations, they have played a wider role in foreign relations: in economic diplomacy, humanitarian aid, democracy promotion and education in the region which makes them worthy of analysis and holding both empirical and theoretical value for understanding TFP.

At the heart of these activities is the centrality of Turkish 'national interest', guiding policies which are favourable to the state, society and Turkey's position in the international community. This does not however necessarily undermine the conceptualization of civil-society as a force for good, but rather raises the material and moral interests motivating these activities. This intersection between interest and identity is not inherently contradictory nor does it necessarily mean that discourses and strategies of humanitarian aid/ diplomacy are purely tools for legitimizing national interest. Humanitarian diplomacy and self-interest can sometimes align such as in Syria where Turkey's efforts, both state and non-state, were as a response to increasing interdependence with the region and public pressure to stabilize Turkey's chaotic neighbourhood. By analysing CSOs progressive and regressive role in society and foreign relations, a more nuanced picture of the reality of these actors can be seen, building on the theoretical role of independence and reform which does not hold sway in the Turkish case.

There has been a revolving door or else close personal relations between the AKP and the board of directors of almost all GNGOs. SETA and MÜSİAD standing as the most obvious examples. However, BNGOs and InNGOs such as the Marmara Foundation also boasted of their close ties with government officials. Nor was this limited to organizations with which the government shared socio-cultural values, but was also exhibited at an institutional level amongst ostensibly independent CSOs. GPoT's Mensur Akgün, formally of TESEV, as well as the IPC's Bülent Aras amongst others were found to have strong relations with government actors, particularly Davutoğlu, with whom both have worked. These relations appeared to be rooted in a shared approach towards conflict resolution in Cyprus and Israel as well as official ties. Think tanks' role in creating normative discourses on these topics being one of the core and most autonomous activities identified in this thesis. The reverse impact of state power on civil-society's agenda and activities was central to this analysis however. Although the results found that CSOs had often been used to support state interests, and as a tool of legitimacy or a proxy, and it is vital scholars and policy makers are aware of the differences in groups supporting state interests, significant evidence was found of autonomous political interests and activities even amongst GNGOs. Particularly with the case of Israel, CSOs were found to exert a conflictual position to the state: having been consulted by policy makers, incorporated into mediation activities they now operate as both opportunities and constraints on TFP, as was found with the case of the IHH restricting avenues for normalization as opposed to the majority of think tanks and business associations who advocated for it.

In summary, prior to 2013, Turkey has increasingly sought to use soft-power tools in its neighbourhood engagement to facilitate its elevated power aspirations, particularly in mediation and conflict resolution. Key AKP figures such as Bülent Aras and Ahmet Davutoğlu have ascribed Turkey's rising profile and role as an international mediator to the mobilization of civil-society, universities and NGOs. Although this research indicates that such statements place far too much importance on the role of NGOs, which in general is still marginal, the reasons behind these statements are perhaps of equal importance. By privileging civil-society, the AKP policy elite were projecting an image of Turkey as a soft-power and model democracy. There are several discourses and practices which have emerged from this self-perception that have implications for Turkey's foreign relations, particularly its actors, alliances, transnational networks and participation in international initiatives. The foremost of which are the civilizational discourse, largely propounded by Ahmet Davutoglu, and the humanitarian one, which are both firmly linked to Turkey's Islamic identity and its 'responsibility' to the Muslim world and are prevalent amongst both NGO and state actors. These discourses have widespread consequences for the enactment of TFP and have, for example, legitimized and driven Turkey's policy towards Israel and Palestine, its infrastructure building and refugee support in northern Iraq and its intervention in the Syria crisis. The rise

of Islamic values within foreign and economic policy is a defining feature of the AKP era and arguable one of the main reasons for the increased inclusion of non-governmental actors in foreign relations. Almost all the recipients of Turkish aid are predominantly Muslim countries or were under Ottoman rule, which cannot be explained by simple security or geopolitics as this extends as far as Myanmar and Somalia. More likely, this is reflective of the conservative nature of both governmental and non-governmental organizations involved in aid, and also reflective of a politicization of the aforementioned.

While not suggested as a comprehensive explanation of change in Turkish foreign-policy, the civil-society factor was found to be an interesting site of inquiry where many of the variables influence TFP play out, particularly identified in influencing orientation, strategy and discourses. The interplay between interest and identity was cited as a core, and understudied factor shaping Turkey's changing relations with the Middle East and channelled through non-state actors. To examine this, a theoretical approach of an amalgamation of several IR theories was taken, joining a growing trend in international relations and foreign-policy analysis that borrows from multiple schools of thought. This builds on the discussion in the introduction of the utility of multiple approaches, realism, constructivism and pluralism in deconstructing TFP. The need for multiple theories was based on an understanding of TFP as complex, and shaped by different individual, state, structural and systemic factors. While it was found that CSOs were playing an undeniable and increasing role prior to 2013, the overarching factor shaping their influence and foreign relations more broadly was found to be the state. That said, the aim of this thesis was to determine instances of influence, instrumentality and impact of CSOs, which have increasingly been found in international relations and state foreign-policy and were formative of the government's soft-power position in the region.

## **1. Epilogue: Post-2013**

Three significant issues have arisen past the scope of this inquiry which demonstrate the importance, but also the fragility of CSOs' involvement in Turkey's foreign relations and standing in the world. This section will briefly discuss the impact of Gezi Park, the rise of ISIS and the AKP- Gülen split and what these changes mean for the future role and influence of civil-society.

Gezi Park posed a fundamental challenge to the government's claims to democratic policy-making, and arguably represents the beginning of the end in that regard as well as the implosion of the Turkish model: a primary image and nation brand of the AKP. Notably, most of the interviewees indicated negative views of the protests, which is revealing of their commitment to democratic principles such as freedom of assembly and speech. This is

indicative of one of the core assertions of this thesis, that traditional CSOs in Turkey have formed a new elite aimed at serving particular interests, be they business, state or otherwise, cooperating with the elite, the military, big business and politicians. There was a swift and significant decline of Turkey's economic and cultural capital during this time, which was damaging to the self-created role of civil-society in Turkey's economic, cultural and humanitarian diplomacy. The Gezi Park movement both undermined Turkey's image as a democratic country and regional power, as well as undermining the democratic potential of civil-society at home, who largely chose to condemn or abstain from comment on the movement. This is revealing regarding the space for dialogue between state and society, apparently almost non-existent when it comes to political contentious issues, as has been seen with the resumption of conflict with the Kurdish south east and the end of the democratic consultative peace process. The Kurdish conflict, which resumed in earnest in 2015 has equally damaged Turkey's civic space and led to a resecuritization of foreign affairs, albeit led by civilian rather than military elites. CSOs have been closed, freedom of speech restricted and avenues for debate and dialogue closed off. This demonstrates the limited potential of CSOs when the domestic environmental context is not conducive to influence, as has been the case since 2013. Both the impact of Gezi and the Kurdish conflict on the influence of civil-society would be fruitful and valuable for further research. They both raise the relative autonomy of CSOs in the international rather than domestic spheres and offer explanations of the enduring visibility and activities of CSOs in the face of widespread state oppression.

The Syrian civil war, although already impacting heavily on TFP as has been noted throughout, the rise of ISIS heightened security concerns in Turkey exponentially. With growing spill-over from this conflict, and expanding Turkish military presence over and along the Syrian border, security once again rose to the fore of TFP. However unlike in previous eras, this was dictated by civilian elites and international forces rather than security elites, illustrative of the desecuritization of policy-making. That said, militarized interventions and the re-emergence of national security interests have destroyed Turkey's image as a soft regional power and impacted on its relations with key states such as Iran, northern Iraq, Russia and Syria. The constriction of trade links and societal ties was an additional and understudied factor in this return to hard-power, due to the implosion of the AKP's strategy of economic interdependence as a method by which to establish regional peace and exert soft-power over regional states: in this case, Syria. This demonstrates the importance of civil-society ties for conflict resolution and peacebuilding, but equally the vulnerability of this strategy due to the dominance of political will, security issues and elite defined 'national interest'. While non-state actors such as business associations and faith-based NGOs attempted to exert pressure over an increasingly intractable policy elite to use diplomatic rather than military tools in this conflict, the dominance of the AKP and its enhanced security apparatus (in this case MIT rather than

the military) saw a reversion to hard and coercive methods of diplomacy, the oppression or marginalization of oppositional CSO groups including those previously thought of as GNGOs such as IHH and Turkey at the epicentre of regional conflict. That said, Turkish faith-based NGOs have continued to play an extremely visible role as a channel and source of humanitarian aid to the region, which while holding little sway over the Syrian regime, has prolonged the image of Turkey as a benevolent regional power long past its official return to hard-power tools. Not only humanitarian NGOs, but think tanks and individuals have been mobilized by this crisis, producing a body of research, advice and public debate previously unseen. They (as with the case of SETA) have also taken an active role in negotiations with Syrian opposition members and are working on conflict resolution efforts. ORSAMs training programmes with Iraqi Turkmen are another example of this, illustrating the enduring input if not influence of CSOs.

The Gülen affair compounded domestic instability and the deterioration of Turkey's nation brand as a soft-power and model for the region following Gezi. Divisions within conservative Islamic business, media and electoral circles bred conspiracy and polarization. Following the split, the AKP seemed to undergo a significant change in tactics, departing from its attempts to exert soft-power through economic, education and humanitarian ties and starting to directly intervene, with accusations of MIT providing arms and training to various rebel factions over the border.<sup>568</sup> Regardless of the veracity, ongoing debates over Turkey's use of hard and covert power will have enduring consequences for Turkish national interest and has already seen a series of attacks ravaging the country. The closure of civil space that followed and an increasingly militarized and securitized approach towards the region are direct results of the AKP- Gülen split, with the elite trying to cling to power through authoritarian means. As discussed in chapter five, as well as lowering trust and destroying channels of interaction between the state and civil-society, the split has eroded the image of Turkey as a humanitarian diplomat, with the AKP privileging its monopoly on power over the humanitarian and education initiatives of the Community. A further issue however, and one that requires another thesis to explore, is the Community's status as 'civil-society' to begin with. If allegations of complicity in the July coup attempt are found to be true, then the plethora of Gülenist institutions which have been closed in the subsequent purges would be defined within traditional literature as uncivil-society. This is an interesting avenue for further research, however well beyond the scope of this thesis due to its basis in unsubstantiated evidence and

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<sup>568</sup> Allegations of Turkey funding and arming rebel fighters in Syria have yet to be verified by independent sources. Humeyra Pamuk and Nick Tattersall, *Reuters*, 'Exclusive: Turkish intelligence helped ship arms to Syrian Islamist rebel areas', (May 21, 2015). Accessed through: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-turkey-arms/exclusive-turkish-intelligence-helped-ship-arms-to-syrian-islamist-rebel-areas-idUSKBN0061L220150521>

links thus far as well as being based on normative assumptions about the composition of civil-society.

Ankara's ties with the Middle East have deteriorated dramatically since 2013, the cut-off point to this study, as has its ties to civil-society. Whilst not proof of causality, the destruction of civic spaces – as well as departure from many of the afore discussed processes that helped build them: democratization, Europeanization, desecuritization - and simultaneous return to top-down, centralized and quasi-authoritarian policy-making in both the domestic and international spheres has led to the end of this more democratic era in Turkey's foreign relations, causality or not. What this research shows is the importance of multiple bilateral relations, not only between elites, but through the economic, social and humanitarian initiatives civil-society is expert in. The raging conflict in the region as well as Turkey's own domestic democratic regression (particularly the anti-civil-society aspect of this) following the Gulen-AKP split and the Gezi Park protests broke most of these ties and has largely returned Turkey's relations with the Middle East to the pre-AKP norm of hostility, economic pragmatism and elite politics. This can also be related to the core themes raised in this thesis: democratization and EU accession. Prior to the Arab Spring and subsequent deterioration of Turkey's EU accession bid, the AKP, at least discursively, privileged civil-society and democracy promotion, conferring that socio-political transformation of the Turkish type would lead to a more stable regional environment. When this strategy for regional leadership failed, and along with it, Turkey's image as a soft-power and model democracy, the need to include CSOs also declined.

The AKP has shown an astute awareness of the power of the civil-society 'toolbox' as a legitimizing discourse/ practice and strategic framing to utilize cultural and ideational resources: indicating that the dissemination of certain decision-making capacities and the utilization of civil-society to achieve foreign-policy objectives was simply a strategic/ practical transformation rather than a bottom-up sustainable change. That said, some of the initiatives launched during the early years of civil-society growth have survived the purges, as have some of Turkey's relations with new actors in the Middle East. Turkey's relations with northern Iraq, which were supported and legitimized by think tanks, entrenched through faith-based NGOs' education initiatives and business associations' economic ventures have endured Turkey's renewed militarism against the PKK. Despite the outright animosity between Turkey and the Syrian regime, Turkish aid organizations are some of the few allowed to operate in the region. The economic pragmatism always shown towards Israel has returned, with the aid of heavy think tank and business association lobbying, but also with the effect of a rift between the Turkish government and IHH, showing the intricate if subtle involvement of CSOs in foreign-policy developments of normalization, rapprochement and even conflict.

The problem of how civil-society can influence foreign relations was solved, insofar as certain environmental prerequisites were identified. Democratization and demilitarization being the first and foremost, which are universally applicable, but in the case of Turkey, economic liberalization and Europeanization were equally important. Should these environmental circumstances change, as we've seen since 2013, civil-society actors institutional space for influence narrows however instances of indirect, international policy implantation and advocacy were still found. What's changed is that the AKP is increasingly reluctant to utilize the civil-society toolkit, which as has been argued, led to a return of coercive and hard-power measures in the region. Should democratic conditions re-emerge, civil-society ties look to be highly important if not crucial to re-establishing cordial relations with Turkey's neighbours, as was the case with rapprochement in the early 2000s with the Middle East.



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## **Interview Appendix 1**

- Interview with Sabiha Senyücel Gündoğar, TESEV, Istanbul, March 13, 2014.
- Interview with Onur Sazak, IPC headquarters, Istanbul, March 13, 2014.
- Interview with Fuat Keyman, IPC headquarters, Istanbul, March 13, 2014.
- Interview with Esen Çağlar TEPAV, Ankara, June 12, 2014.
- Interview with Esen Çağlar TOBB, Ankara, June 12, 2014.
- Interview with TEPAV staff, Ankara, June 12, 2014.
- Interview with Auveen Woods, IPC, Istanbul, February 11, 2015.
- Participant observation, IPC conferences, multiple dates, 2015.
- Interview with Serhat Guvenc, Kadir Has University, Istanbul, February 9, 2015.
- Interviews with Hakan Yilmaz, Bogazici University, Istanbul, February 15, 2015.
- Interview with Erhan Dogan, Marmara University, Istanbul, February 16, 2015.
- Interview with Hazar Vural, Marmara Foundation, Istanbul, March 10, 2015.
- Interview with Marmara Foundation staff, Istanbul, March 10, 2015.
- Interview with Mensur Akgün, GPoT, Istanbul, May 10, 2014.
- Meeting with GPoT staff, May 10, 2014.
- Interview with Izzet Sahin, IHH headquarters, Istanbul, March 13, 2014.
- Meeting with IHH staff, Istanbul, March 13, 2014.
- Interview with Muzaffer Baca, International Blue Crescent, Istanbul, March 15, 2015.
- Meeting with IBC staff, Istanbul, March 15, 2015.
- Interview with Erhan Kilicdaroglu, Sabanci University, personal correspondence through multiple interviews, March 2015.
- Interview with Ufuk Ulutas, SETA, Ankara, March 23, 2015.
- Interview with Savaş Metin, Kimse Yok Mu, Ankara, March 23, 2015.
- Interview with Turgut Karam Mehmet, Kimse Yok Mu, Ankara, March 23, 2015.
- Meeting with KYM staff, Ankara, March 23, 2015.
- Interview with Gencer Ozcan of GPoT, Istanbul, March 26, 2015.
- Meeting with GPoT staff, March 26, 2015.

Interview with a veteran TRT journalist, name withheld, Ankara, March 29, 2015.

Interview with Bilge Duman of ORSAM, Ankara, October 13, 2015.

Interview with ORSAM staff, Ankara, October 13, 2015.

Interview with Mehmet Yegin of USAK, Ankara, October 16, 2015.

Interview with USAK staff, Ankara, October 16, 2015.

Interview with Somali peace-keeping and state-building official (anonymous), Skype, June 1, 2016.